The Best of TARDIS Eruditorum

Philip Sandifer

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Introduction: A Mad Man With a Blog

I've never actually put this introduction in a book. No particular reason - I just wrote a different one when I collected the Hartnell posts into a book, and then kept revising that one, leaving this to gather dust at the far end of my blog. But since this is a collection of blogposts and not a volume of the book series *TARDIS Eruditorum*, it seems appropriate to reprint it.

Still, some explanation may be in order. TARDIS Eruditorum is a history of Doctor Who, though one not quite like most others. It goes story by story, but it does not purport to offer reviews of the stories. My opinions often shine through, but they're not the goal. Nor is it a history of the making of Doctor Who - many of those exist, some of them quite good.

TARDIS Eruditorum is a history of Doctor Who as a cultural object. More broadly, it's the history of a particular vision of the United Kingdom - one based on the peculiar relationship between the mainstream and the marginal within its culture - and of how that vision has evolved and responded to the last fifty years.

TARDIS Eruditorum is also a blog, and this book culls twenty of my favorite essays from the blog as a sort of preview. The title proclaims it *The Best of TARDIS Eruditorum*, but like most best-ofs, this is a lie – it's really a smattering of posts that are some combination of popular and, in the author's estimation, pretty good, with a selection bias that leans towards posts that follow from one another (so you can see the blog's thought on the Cybermen evolve from the Hartnell to Colin Baker era) and an attempt to have around two posts per Doctor (Tom Baker and Sylvester McCoy get two, Eccleston and Tennant get one, the former because he only has the one season and the *Rose* post is very long, the latter because at the time of writing I've only done about five Tennant posts). If you like it, good news - the entire blog is available for free online. There are also three, soon to be four, book versions available on Amazon.

I should note that many of the essays - everything after the Third Doctor - are taken straight from the blog. They have not gone to the copyeditor I employ for the book versions, and may have typos or moments of mild incoherence. This should be treated as a marker of their punk authenticity and status as raw, honest prose. Or as something I just didn't have the time to do in order to get this collection to the Storybundle folks.

Most of the posts on TARDIS Eruditorum are essays about specific Doctor Who stories, although other sorts exist. One sort, Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea, covers topics other than Doctor Who in terms of how they intersect with Doctor Who. Three such essays appear here, in the Pertwee era and each of the Baker eras. The remaining seventeen essays are selected from across the history of the series, and include short introductions like this specially written for this collection.

If you like these essays, many, many more are available at tardiseruditorum.com, and new ones appear thrice weekly at philipsandifer.com.

All of which said, here's how I introduced TARDIS Eruditorum when I started it.

About a month into its 48th year of existence, the Christmas special of Doctor Who was watched by one sixth of the population of Great Britain. I would compare that to some television show for Americans, but there isn't one. Nothing in America is that proportionally popular. Certainly nothing sci-fi or fantasy.

Doctor Who aired the day after the Kennedy assassination, an event it is weirdly and inexorably

linked to. The show has not been on the air all 48 years since it debuted - only 32 of them - but there has not been a year when some officially sanctioned Doctor Who stories have not come out. And there is no reason why that should ever stop being true. Because there is no way to run out of Doctor Who stories. At least, not without running out of stories entirely.

Doctor Who is a story about a man with a magical blue box that can go anywhere and any time. The man is, for all practical purposes, immortal. When something happens that would kill him, he just changes into a new man and walks away to new adventures.

John Lasseter, with whom I am hesitant to ever argue about storytelling, has said that there is only one story in the world. A man comes into town, and everything changes. By this standard, every story is a Doctor Who story, as every Doctor Who story is exactly that - a man with a magical blue box comes into town, and everything changes.

And so as long as there are stories, there are Doctor Who stories. When the stars go out and the universe freezes, around the last fire on the last world, there will still be Doctor Who stories to tell. And when we are done telling them, at long and final last, in the distance will be a strange wheezing, groaning sound. And out will step an impossible man, and he will save the day.

I believe this. I believe this because to disbelieve this is to disbelieve that stories have power. To disbelieve this is to disbelieve that there is hope. To disbelieve this is to believe that there is such a thing as being alone. I believe this because disbelieving it is too awful to imagine.

This is the story of a story that can never end. This is the story of how a daft idea from the bowels of the BBC in the 1960s changed everything. This is the story of an impossible man, and his magic box, and everything that happened after.

Because there's something you'd better understand about me. Because it's important, and one day, your life may depend on it.

I am definitely a mad man with a blog.

A Place Where Nothing is Impossible (*The Web Planet*)

One of the tricky things about writing a blog is that unlike writing a book you have all the crap you write trying to learn how to write that project published. I've papered over the worst of the cracks in the earliest *TARDIS Eruditorum* posts for the book versions, but the fact remains that it isn't until the second season of the show that the blog really hit its stride. Though, to be fair, that's also true of Doctor Who.

Still, there's a bunch of entries in this season where I feel like the blog hits its stride. I'm terribly partial to *The Rescue*, which I argue has the best twist in all of Doctor Who as a man in a dodgy rubber suit is revealed to secretly be a man in a dodgy rubber suit, and *The Chase*, in which I try to redeem an irredeemably bad story. But for me *The Web Planet* is where the blog really starts to fire on all cylinders and do what it's best at: looking at Doctor Who as a television show of its era and figuring out the full implications of that.

The Web Planet is a strange and not entirely loved story. It is slow and hard to watch. But judged as something other than entertainment for the year 2013 - something it manifestly isn't anyway - it's one of the most interesting experiences in Doctor Who.

I showed my now-wife *The Web Planet* relatively early in our relationship, in defiance of near-universal consensus that this is a bad idea. She loved it. It was, I admit, a test.

It's February 13, 1965. The Righteous Brothers are at number one complaining that you've misplaced your loving feeling. Over the next six weeks, we'll also see The Kinks with "Tired of Waiting For You," The Seekers "I'll Never Find Another You," Tom Jones with "It's Not Unusual," and The Rolling Stones with "The Last Time." Other artists of note are The Animals, The Moody Blues, Wayne Fontana and the Mind Benders, and Herman's Hermits, The album charts are mostly The Rolling Stones, with The Beatles taking the top spot for fun one week.

What you have to realize about these times is that, looking at what was popular, it is very clear that the world was changing. That things that had previously bubbled under the mainstream have, at this point, broken through in a big way. The Rolling Stones and The Beatles are the visible part of what it is increasingly clear is a 90% obscured iceberg. In America, the Civil Rights movement is at its boiling point. White supremacists are beating demonstrators to death. Malcolm X is assassinated. Elsewhere, The Gambia obtains independence from the UK, the first spacewalk is conducted by Aleksei Leonov, and the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965 begins. This is not the present day by any stretch of the imagination. But it is also impossible to argue that 1965 is in any way more normal or understandable than the present day. The world of 1965 is staggeringly complex and weird.

I bring this up because for these six weeks, Doctor Who is showing *The Web Planet*. This is easily the weirdest Doctor Who to date, and a strong contender for weirdest ever. It is also among the most popular stories ever, in terms of viewers, and one of the least popular stories ever by most other metrics. It is also, however, largely misunderstood.

The word used in almost every review of *The Web Planet* is "ambitious." It's easy to see why. Every character save for the TARDIS crew in this story is non-human. You've got the Zarbi - bipedal ants who make a constant beeping sound. You've got the Menoptra - butterfly people, and the Optera - sort of grub creatures. And you've got the Animus - a giant tentacle monster. The episode is a special effects bonanza as a result.

And here's where people misunderstand it. Much is made of Doctor Who's wobbly sets and poor

effects. And it's true - the effects on Doctor Who are often a bit cheap. (Although as Toby Hadoke will rush to point out, the sets only wobble a handful of times) Pointing this out is fine. And because it has so many effects, *The Web Planet* has become exhibit A for those who want to talk about bad special effects.

The problem isn't with the accuracy of this claim. *The Web Planet* has some special effects howlers, including a Zarbi walking into the camera. The problem is with the implications of the claim, where the bad special effects are described as being "unrealistic," "unconvincing," or, my personal favorite, "unbelievable."

There's a moment on the DVD commentary for a Russell T. Davies-penned Doctor Who episode where the show briefly appears to have killed off Rose. And Davies and Phil Collins, one of the other executive producers, are talking about whether children would believe that they really did kill of Rose. Collins says that he hopes children would not be so cynical as to say, "Oh, they wouldn't really do that." And Russell T. Davies, in what is, to my mind, the most revealing thing he has ever said on a DVD commentary, says, "That's not cynical. That's wise."

That, right there, is the heart of the issue. The fact that Davies understands that is why he was able to make Doctor Who as successful as it had ever been. And it's telling that one of the times in its original run where it was that successful was *The Web Planet*.

Apologists for the episode usually fall back on a defense along the lines of "watch it from a 1965 perspective and it's more convincing." This is, essentially, an argument about suspension of disbelief. The idea here is that viewers in 1965 could overlook the silliness and get themselves to believe what they were seeing, but that we can't anymore.

This is ridiculous. Even viewers in 1965 could tell that William Hartnell was flubbing his lines left, right, and center, and could notice when one of the Zarbi actors walked into a camera. William Hartnell trails off in mid-line after identifying the planet as Vortis and William Russell sort of wearily says "What galaxy is that in, Doctor" to prompt him, it does not take some savvy modern viewer to know what's going on. I'll go so far as to say that even some of the children watching in 1965 were savvy enough about how television worked to see a monster hit a camera or to recognize when an actor flubbed a line.

Modern viewers, for some reason, assume that the much beloved TV Tropes website represents some new understanding of narrative. And so they assume that, for instance, viewers in 1965 were somehow more convinced by what that site calls "People in Rubber Suits" than they are today. This is worth considering. So here's your assignment. Go find a picture of the Zarbi online.

Now, looking at that picture, what seems more likely? That viewers in 1965 could not tell that two of those legs were not like the others, or that viewers in 1965 were well aware that those were men running around in ant costumes? It seems to me that any argument that is dependent on the idea that anyone, ever, in the history of the planet has looked at a Zarbi and seen anything other than a man in an ant suit is extremely, extremely strained.

But why would that be a problem? Outside of television and film, we don't really get very worked up about this sort of thing. Nobody has ever read a book and gone "Ooh, these ink stains on this piece of dead tree pulp don't look much like what they describe." Painting didn't get to photorealism for centuries. And most of the great advances in art – impressionism in the form of Van Gogh and Monet being perhaps the most obvious example – are based on finding interesting ways to distort reality, as opposed to finding techniques that depict it more slavishly. The idea that art might be non-representational is not actually a very complex or hard to accept one to anyone but a TV/film obsessive.

And yet in all the discussions of *The Web Planet* - and the Lawrence Miles/Tat Wood *About Time* books spend a thousand words on the issue of influences on this story alone - nobody seems to mention one of the most obvious ones: George Méliès's early film *A Trip to the Moon. A Trip to the Moon* is a loose adaptation of both HG Wells's *The First Men in the Moon* and Jules Verne's *A Trip to the Moon*. Filmed in a lavish and ornate style with tons of elaborate costumes and pageantry, the film is probably best known for the sequence in which the rocket hits the man in the moon squarely in the eye. Its point is clearly not to ask seriously "what is it like on the moon," but rather to provide a compelling spectacle.

Comparing to this sort of approach clarifies *The Web Planet* tremendously. For instance, there's a scene in the first episode where The Doctor and Ian appear to stare up at a massive stone edifice. It's an obvious effects shot, emphasized by the way it's edited into the episode (The Doctor and Ian walk off screen, we cut to the massive edifice shot, and then we cut back to the previous set with the Doctor and Ian walking back from the edifice). The only point of the shot is to show off that they can have that effect. In fact, much of the episode is structured around that effect shot. But crucially, if that effects shot is meant to be believable, that makes no sense. That kind of effort only makes sense if the effect is going to be noticed - i.e. if it's going to be visible as an effect. (This argument applies to almost any special effects that are hailed as centerpieces of their texts)

In this interpretation, *The Web Planet* is interesting as a series of set pieces - as a six-week long exercise in spectacle that was not going for convincing illusion, but rather for striking visuals. This is well-supported by the story at large. Take, for instance, the bizarre lighting effects used for all shots of the surface of the planet Vortis, produced by smearing the camera lenses with Vaseline. Or, for that matter, the decision to have Rosalyn de Winter, a choreographer, work with the Menoptra to make them seem suitably alien. All of these make *The Web Planet* extremely visually distinctive.

The result is, in fact, stunning. Realistic? No. But all the same, stunning, in the same way as Méliès - a spectacle. And if *The Web Planet* is read in this way, which, as I said, is almost certainly the way it was read by its initial audience, it makes a lot more sense. It certainly explains why it was one of two stories from the second season to be novelized in the 1960s.

Ah. Right. The novels. I've actually devoted the entirety of the entry on *The Smugglers* to them, so for now, let's note simply that in 1964, David Whitaker's novelization of *The Daleks*, entitled *Doctor Who in an Exciting Adventure With the Daleks* was published, and in 1965 two follow-ups based on this story and the next were published. And that these were the first instances of something that would eventually prove to be quite important for the series.

The thing that you have to realize is that in 1965, there was nothing resembling home video. When *Doctor Who and the Zarbi* came out, six months after airing, it was the closest thing to a personal copy of *The Web Planet* as existed. In fact, more to the point, it was the closest thing to a personal copy of the story that could possibly exist – the idea of a personal copy of a film or television episode was completely inconceivable. That wasn't how those media worked.

With this in mind, we can see that purpose of the book was to spur memories of the popular serial *The Web Planet* – essentially the sort of role that illustrated guides to the Doctor Who monsters and the like satisfy today. Notably, like the modern day equivalents, the book was illustrated. The illustrations are nothing special, but they are telling in that they emphasize the points of visual spectacle more than the crucial twists in the narrative. So, for instance, the special effects shot of Ian and the Doctor staring up at an impossibly large stone edifice is recreated in the book, even though its plot relevance is basically nil. This strongly suggests that the point of the exercise is not to be exciting on its own merits, but rather to jog memories of an exciting TV story. (A canny reader may also notice

that the book refers to the Doctor as Doctor Who. We'll deal with that, but again, in another entry.)

The thing about spectacle is that it provides an opportunity for a very specific sort of horror. Much is made of Doctor Who's supposed scariness. And much of that scariness, as I've already suggested, comes from making the familiar strange. In this regard, the fact that *The Web Planet* was visibly produced is a major asset, because its bizarre visual landscape is not entirely alien. The frisson produced by the serial is precisely because what we are seeing is clearly a human design that does not look like human design is supposed to look.

And so there's some real horror here. Not merely scary bits, but horror – a sustained, conscious attempt to make things scary in general, as opposed to at specific moments. A major plot point in the first few episodes is a gold control harness that turns whomever it's put on into a mindless drone controlled by the Animus. After an extended sequence in which Barbara is taken over by the gold bracelet she happens to be wearing, we get a truly awful set of plot twists in which the harness is several times forced onto Vicki, and we watch the young companion figure - the supposed image of the future of Britain - suddenly go blank, her entire personality taken away. And it's scary. It is genuinely psychologically horrifying. One moment she's fighting and screaming, and the next all that personality is just gone.

And that's not the only really horrifying bit. There's one cut in the serial where the camera suddenly jumps to a completely unclear image as the soundtrack takes a turn into a sort of proto-Diamanda Galas screaming. It's completely alienating – a refusal to conform to the normative visual grammar of television storytelling in 1965.

This is crucial. It is not so much that *The Web Planet* was ahead of its time and trying to do more than was capable in 1965. It wasn't. *The Web Planet* feels as though it existed in a wholly parallel time. The entire visual style of the story is focused on the task of making it seem nothing like television in 1965 seems like. And so when we get put off by it, that's not us failing to think like 1965. It's us failing to realize that we're actually having the exact right reaction.

People, frustratingly, miss this. Miles and Wood accuse the episode of failing to try to make the world credible, saying "Faced with an overwhelming mass of insect-flesh, what we really need here is for all those involved - both behind and in front of the camera - to play it casual. If everyone on Vortis acted as if this were their natural environment, and as if butterfly-people were a perfectly normal pan of the terrain, then after an episode or so we might forget the weirdness of it and treat it as a place where interesting things might happen."

Baloney. *The Web Planet* is supposed to be shockingly weird. So that, in part 5, when there's a bit of a comic interlude about a tamed Zarbi that Vicki insists on nicknaming Zombo, the comedy does not so much fall flat as make the entire situation even weirder. It's a strikingly bizarre moment, but it's hard to laugh at it because the series has just taken us completely off the map so that even comic beats like this leave us uncomfortable.

Because, for instance, in the same episode you have a sequence where Ian and some of the Optera are walking through some caves and find a spot where the way is blocked. The story has already spent a good deal of time establishing the alien characters as, well, alien - the Menoptra, for instance, have monologues including lines like "light was our god and we existed in light flying above thought," which is both oddly poetic and alienating. This sequence with the Optera begins by picking up on that tendency, describing the problem as "A silent wall. We must make mouths in it with our weapons. Then it will speak more light."

And then it goes nuts. They break through the wall, and it turns out to have been holding back deadly acid. At which point one of the Optera shoves her head into the wall to block the flow of acid.

The remaining Optera calmly leave her body behind, saying that this is part of the dangers of living below ground, leaving Ian standing beside a giant insect corpse with its head shoved in a wall. If the sequence sounds bizarre, it is. It's easily one of the strangest things I've ever watched. But when this sort of absurdity abuts comedy about Zombo the Friendly Zarbi the resulting effect is a striking alienation.

This sort of thing is the *point* of Doctor Who. The entire concept of the series is that it's a means of taking ordinary people – Ian and Barbara – and thrusting them into bizarre situations where they don't belong. Then the series revels in the bizarre tensions this sets up. The Web Planet takes this approach to a new and higher level. The entire normal structure of narrative is juxtaposed with the world. Pathos, exposition, and comedy are all made strange. Not so strange that we don't recognize them when we see them, but strange enough that they jar. Ian and Barbara aren't the only things that don't belong on Vortis. The viewer, heck, the *camera* doesn't belong there.

All of this comes to a head with the story's villain, the Animus. This is the first time that Doctor Who has provided a villain of this sort - an almost godlike being. Later writers engaged in a kind of ham-handed retcon that proclaimed the Animus, along with some other classic villains, to in fact be explicitly part of the Cthulhu mythos (Animus is apparently Lloigar, a 1932 creation of August Derleth – i.e. not even a proper Lovecraftian monster). Although this retcon was, all told, a pretty dumb idea that does some real injustice to Bill Strutton's creation of the Animus, the observation that there's something Lovecraftian about this monster is pretty on target.

The Animus appears in two distinct stages. At first it is simply something that the Doctor talks to by walking into a sort of weird speaking tube. Although the Doctor covers with glib humor (and a kind of brilliant lampshading), referring to the Animus as a giant hairdryer, the fact of the matter is, it's clear that this being is something the Doctor fears. The Animus is both vastly powerful - it controls all of the Zarbi - and intelligent. Although its second form is mocked along with the other effects, it too is deeply creepy - a mass of bizarre lights and fleshy tentacles that is profoundly weird even with the rest of *The Web Planet* to lead up to it.

The result is a strong sense that Vortis is a place that the Doctor and his companions should not be, and that this is a scarier adventure than usual. This sense of fear is heightened by the fact that this story involves some real assaults on the TARDIS. The story is the first time that the trope of the TARDIS being pulled down to a planet appears. The Doctor has not inadvertently landed on Vortis, he's been trapped there. For the first time, lengthy TARDIS scenes exist in which the TARDIS is a prison, not an opportunity. It's not malfunctioning here - it's been taken over. And since the TARDIS is central to the idea of what Doctor Who is, when it's in danger, that means something very different. We know by this point that the companions are replaceable. The TARDIS isn't.

This story is also the first time that a monster enters the TARDIS. The overwhelming message is that the Doctor and his companions are just completely out of their league. And when the story finally resolves, with Barbara managing to kill the Animus, the victory feels like luck - the Doctor and Vicki have already failed, and Barbara can barely get the weapon she uses to work.

It would be one thing if these constant creepy and unnerving set pieces got in the way of the characters, but they don't. The Doctor is anarchically manic, continuing the odd sense of characterization as a young man we saw last episode. Ian and Barbara have a deepening relationship - Barbara's resolve to destroy the Animus is given a crucial boost by Ian appearing at the last second, a sort of Power of Love ending of the sort that will become standard under Russell T. Davies. Vicki and Barbara's banter provides the first episode, which is otherwise a kind of lengthy trudge around an

empty planet, with considerably more energy and fun (although it's very difficult not to get the sense that Vicki is trying to seduce Barbara).

The story, in other words, is unmistakably a case of familiar, well-loved characters thrown into an impossibly strange situation full of bizarre spectacle. The audience does not need to "believe" the spectacle to get into this, because the main dramatic tension is in fact how weird and strange everything is. Immersion and belief are anathema to what's going on here - bizarre and unsettling theatrical staging does a much better job of making the audience feel uncomfortable and lost (much like the characters) than any sort of realism possibly could. If we were to understand and believe Vortis, all of its horror would drain away.

And yet the default assumption on this story - and apparently why Spooner accepted the script - is that it's a parable about communism, with the Zarbi being the deluded working class. Miles and Wood suggest that the story is about the working class, making much of the fact that the Zarbi are portrayed as cattle. The only problem is that, by all appearances, that's exactly what they are. At no point is there any serious suggestion that the Zarbi are anything other than oversized ants who are being controlled by the malevolent Animus. There's no politics to be had with the Zarbi for the simple reason that they have nothing resembling autonomy or will. They look like ants. They act like ants. If they were portrayed as having any will apart from what the Animus forces them to do, that would be one thing, and possibly a parable about communism. As it stands, the story is not some expressly political parable. It's a creepy-ass story about the weirdness of its own special effects.

In other words, the biggest mistake that you can make about this story - and, maddeningly, the mistake that people most often make in discussing the story - is to treat it as a realist piece of science fiction that's a direct parable about the world of 1965. The truth is far more complex, and far more interesting - *The Web Planet* is a story about freaking out the audience and making them uncomfortable. Because the big problem with people's assumptions regarding this story is simple - they assume that because it was made in 1965, it's less modern than Doctor Who is now.

It's not. If anything, *The Web Planet* goes further than almost anything on television today. See for yourself. Add the story on Netflix and watch it for the spectacle. Or, better yet, find a scratchy VHS copy. This is not a story to enjoy in VidFIREd high-resolution glory. This is a television to watch in a darkened room on a flickering TV set with a hazy image – much as it would have been in 1965.

A Chrysalis Case After Its Spread Its Wings (*The Tenth Planet*)

Somewhere in the depths of the third season of Doctor Who I decided, for reasons I could not articulate on a bet, that it would be a good idea to start dealing heavily with psychedelia and mysticism. Part of this was the explicit comparison in internal documents of the Doctor's transfromation into Patrick Troughton with an LSD trip. Part of it was just that I wanted to deal with the emerging counterculture.

Even given this, Kenneth Grant is an odd choice. For one thing, he wasn't actually writing in the 1960s - rather he was having the disturbing mystical experiences that formed the basis of his later writing in the 1960s. Still, the underlying image of a decaying, rotting negative image of spirituality fascinated me, and it seemed so suitable for the original Cybermen, a set of creepy and unnerving horrors that are never really reused anywhere else in Doctor Who.

To my mild astonishment, it worked, setting a precedent that the blog would never really look back from as the questions of spirituality and mysticism became central to it. Some day I may understand how that seemingly insane decision worked in my favor, but really, I'd hate to sound like I'm complaining.

All of which said, it's probably the observation that Hartnell's regeneration is actually built to and not a weird thing tacked onto the end of "the first Cybermen story" that makes this essay work.

It's October 8, 1966. Jim Reeves is posthumously at number one with "Distant Drums." The Rolling Stones, The Supremes, The Who, Dusty Springfield, and The Troggs are all charting. "Distant Drums" will hold #1 for three weeks, before The Four Tops take it. In the news, we have our standard smattering of 60s misfortune with a side of a massive coal disaster that kills 144 people, mostly children, in the Welsh village of Aberfan, and the infamous escape of George Blake, a British spy and double agent for Russia, from prison in London.

But let's be honest, it's hard to approach this one from that direction. Which is a pity. There are stories fandom has done some mean things to over the years, but few we've been as brutal to as this one. Ask a reasonably dedicated fan, and there are two things to know about this story - it's the first regeneration story, and the first Cybermen story. And that basically defines it. The trouble is, it's neither.

It's certainly not the first regeneration story. Wood and Miles make a compelling case for this, including their observation, much ignored by the rest of fandom, that for years *Doctor Who Magazine* didn't even count this story as a regeneration, instead saying it was a "rejuvenation," and thus a completely different thing from what happens in, say, *The Caves of Androzani*. Even if you do take the modern viewpoint that what happens at the end of this story is the same thing that happens at the end of *The End of Time Part II*, though, the fact of the matter is, treating this as the first regeneration story reads it the wrong way. Calling it a regeneration story treats the ending as a defined, known thing. We get to read the story in the context of the other seven regeneration stories (For a variety of reasons, I don't count *Time and the Rani*), and get to define it via a raft of stuff that came later.

The same problem exists with calling it the first Cybermen story. Never mind that the Cybermen never look or act like this again. The real problem is that this means that when they show up, the audience reaction is "Oh, it's the Cybermen." Which is a fine reaction, but it's manifestly not the reaction the story is going for. The Cybermen in this story are not the classic monsters who are returning for another round. They're the bizarre new villains who are making their first appearance.

It is admittedly a challenge to scrape off the forty-five years of reputation that have been built on this story. The problem is, at this point the reputation is spoiling our view. Read from the future, we see all sorts of cracks. The Cybermen look like men in lycra. The regeneration is unexplained and doesn't seem a natural extension of what went before, meaning Hartnell gets a kind of feeble sendoff. (Pertwee gets "A tear, Sarah Jane?" Baker gets "It's the end, but the moment has been prepared for." Davison gets "I might regenerate. I don't know. It feels different this time." Hartnell? He gets "Keep warm." He doesn't even get any carrot juice.) And a legion of slicker bases under slicker sieges make this one look a bit cheap. But all of those cracks are only visible because for forty-five years one of the basic mandates of Doctor Who has been "Take *The Tenth Planet* and do it again with more modern sensibilities." Which is, not that *The Tenth Planet* is as good as *Hamlet*, kind of like saying *Hamlet* is rubbish because *The Lion King* has better songs.

No. If we're going to come at this one in a remotely sensible manner, we're going to have to throw the future out and look at this as the 1966 story it is.

Much has been made of the way that the story seems business as usual until the regeneration crops up. Our standard reference books - Wood and Miles and Shearman and Hadoke - insist studiously that it isn't. The truth is somewhere in between. Certainly nothing in the beginning of the story suggests that it is anything other than a continuation of the cod-Quatermass vibe we got from *The War Machines*, which is by far the second most important antecedent to this story. The establishing shots of the story are a rocket launch and some mucking about in a control room - as direct a structural quote of *The Quatermass Experiment* as can be managed.

So when we get a bog-standard sequence of Hartnell and his companions in the TARDIS, we have every reason to expect we're getting *The War Machines* redux. The only reason to suspect anything is amiss is if you've been reading the papers and know that Hartnell is on his way out.

On the other hand, there are at least some things amiss. The base is full of ethnic acting, giving it an international feel, at least when it isn't busy giving it an "oh god make the pain stop" feel. (I will be the first to admit that the ethnic acting is this story's weakest spot. Although the worst offender, Robert Beatty's General Cutler, is probably supposed to sound that way, for better or for worse) The cutting among monitors and space capsules gives this story a global feel only hinted at in *The War Machines*. And the setting - 1986 - is compelling, in that it is a date that is obtainable within people's lifetimes. (Remember that *The Time Travellers* got much of its impact from the fact that it was set at a time Ian and Barbara would conceivably survive into. Its debt to this story, which it overtly recognizes, along with *The War Machines*, to which it is a de facto sequel, is considerable.) This is not a "five minutes in the future" style contemporary Earth story like *The War Machines*, but it is still trying something in the same vein - a vision of the future that is of something that the viewers are likely to see.

And then, as the first episode winds on, things get even weirder. One of the basic appeals of Doctor Who is its sheer pluck - the fact that it's the sort of show that, to pick a non-random example, can give you the Doctor teaming up with Richard Nixon to fight UFO-type aliens despite the fact that this premise is completely mad. This sort of spectacle-based storytelling is a fairly modern invention - the Hartnell stories indulged in it occasionally, but usually only when Daleks were involved. But here we get a whopper - more or less out of nowhere, an entire new planet drops into existence near the Earth.

It's tough to say how weird this would have seemed in 1966. You'd need someone who was more of an expert on pop astronomy than I am to know whether anyone seriously believed planets might just drop by unexpectedly and say hi. (Let's be fair, mere months ago Doctor Who was in movie theaters with the Daleks wanting a planet to drive around, so as insane as this seems now, the

problem might be us, not them.) But regardless of whether the show blew all credibility with that plot twist, or, perhaps more importantly, when nobody is easily able to recognize that Mondas is very obviously an upside-down Earth (Polly is the first one to get it, because she can identify, of all things, Malaysia, but throughout the story this is treated as a controversial point despite the fact that the audience can see it within seconds), surely the arrival of another planet in orbit is a sign that this is not business as usual.

Especially because, and here's where things really get wacky, the Doctor knows this is going to happen. We've had a lot of "you can't rewrite history" and the importance of historical inevitability before, but this is the first time that attitude has been projected on our future. This is not merely a story about another planet showing up in the sky alongside ours - it's a story about how this is necessarily and absolutely going to happen as an inevitable part of human history.

From there we get the first cliffhanger - a sort that we actually haven't seen since *The Daleks*, at least as an opening cliffhanger. An alien ship lands outside the Snowcap base, and out step strange looking men who butcher the humans. Then we end on a close-up of their expressionless, mummified faces. This is a lot of why I insist on not reading this story as "the first Cybermen story." Because of this cliffhanger, which is very clearly not "Oh crap, it's the Cybermen," but rather "What the hell is THAT?"

Which raises an interesting question. What the hell is that? If we reject reading these things as the lovable robots who faff around in *Silver Nemesis*, what are we left with? Well now, that's a good question. Let's stop here and say that if you haven't read the Pop Between Realities essay about 1966 counter-culture, this might be a good time to do that. Specifically the bits about Kenneth Grant.

The key thing to know here is that there exists a model of spiritual enlightenment in which enlightenment is a horrifying and bleak thing. The adjective I'm going to use for this sort of enlightenment - Qlippothic - is important. Basically, it suggests that there is a form of enlightenment that can be found by encountering and contemplating the darkest parts of humanity. The Qlippoth refer to the hollowed out, vacant, and rotted shells of spiritual concepts. And the whole radical idea of Kenneth Grant is that there's not actually a difference between those, which are basically the horrible nightmares within humanity, and actual enlightenment.

I mention this because it's basically 100% necessary to understanding the Cybermen. I'm not saying that Kit Pedler was chillaxing in the Typhonic order with Kenneth Grant (though that would be awesome), but the ideas are clearly similar. Certainly it's worth noting that Pedler's original conception of the Cybermen was as a race of "star monks." Here it is instructive to look at the origin of the Cybermen, as completely and utterly screwed up as it may be. Mondas and Earth are twin planets - the one an inversion of the other. The Cybermen tell us that they and Mondas "drifted away on a journey," making a sweeping arm motion as they do, and that they went to the edge of space, then returned. In the course of that journey, their bodies wore out and they steadily replaced themselves with spare parts, removing human weaknesses in the process.

The Cybermen, in other words, are an alternative version of humanity - the dark mirror of humanity, who went on a quest for spiritual enlightenment and succeeded at terrible cost. This is the heart of their debate with Polly towards the start of the episode - one that is very cleverly staged. The audience, naturally, sympathizes with Polly, who has several built-in advantages when it comes to debating the Cybermen, namely that she is a human, a regular character, fairly attractive, and is arguing for fairly intuitive points like "Letting people die is mean." This is contrasted with the Cybermen, who are cold, inhuman, and all for letting major characters die. But the thing is, the Cybermen get to win the debate with their brilliantly cutting line "There are people dying all over

your world, yet you do not care about them."

In other words, the narrative leaves just enough space for us to sympathize with the Cybermen. The Doctor continually treats them with respect and fear. Polly is shot down by them. Their explanations make sense. They offer a world of positive freedom - a world free of pain and misery and fear. And so when they say that they'll just be bringing all of humanity over to Mondas to be converted into Cybermen, well, that's certainly not nice, but it's not a bunch of Daleks shouting "Exterminate" (or a bunch of Cybermen shouting "Delete") either.

Let's pause here also to talk about the look of the Cybermen. These are the most human they'll ever look in the series history, with still-human hands. It's easy to view this as a mistake, and to decide that their appearance in The Moonbase four months later is the show going back and doing them "right." But again, nobody watching this would know that this isn't how the Cybermen are supposed to look. And they do look terrifying - human but not. Much has been said both praising and mocking the voices of the Cybermen in this story. There's a certain tiresome nature to this debate. Those who mock the voices correctly point out that they sound absurd, and that they are nothing like the harsh robotic conquerers of later Cybermen. True enough, of course, but when the Cybermen of *Attack of the Cybermen* or *Revenge of the Cybermen* are your benchmark, you're not exactly setting your goals very high.

Those who praise the voices appreciate the harsh, shocking nature of them, and are largely on target (certainly Nicholas Briggs does some amazing stuff with them in the Big Finish audio Spare Parts, but then, Briggs has at this point become a bewildering yet amazing voice artist specializing specifically in recreating old Doctor Who monster voices and making them capable of acting), but as Toby Hadoke points out in *Running Through Corridors*, it's easy for him and Shearman to praise them because they're the sort of people who look for the existential body horror in things.

I am, predictably, more on the side of Shearman and Hadoke, but the thing I think they sell short in their praise of the voices is that the entire story interprets very well from an existential body horror angle, as opposed to just the Cybermen. The entire point of the voices is to be a grotesque parody of human speech - the Cybermen's mouths open and the synthesized speech seems to pour horrifically out of their mouths. Given that the show makes the extremely brave decision to let the Cybermen win the ethics debate in this episode, the voices are an important move to make sure we realize just how horrific these people are. Not evil, mind you, but horrific.

Which is a crucial thing about the Cybermen. Wood and Miles have about three solid pages in About Time Volume 2 about this, but the basic point is that Pedler is extrapolating from a sort of harmful medicine here, combining fears of artificial hearts with anxiety over the use of mood-altering drugs both prescription and recreational and a general ambivalence about artificial goods in general. But he's not quite choosing to seal the deal, and that's significant. He could make the Cybermen into the Autons - plastic monsters who are just evil. He doesn't. Instead, through plasticity and inhumanity, the Cybermen reach a sort of terrible apotheosis. They are at once the best that humans can be and terrifying monsters - a set of anxieties and hopes blended together chaotically.

In the face of these, the Doctor runs into a problem that he's been having for a while. He starts to drop out of the narrative. He looks out of place in this base. With nobody but a loud American to talk to (and we've already talked about how ill-suited the Doctor is to Americans), the Doctor is forced to the perimeter of the plot, with the center being consumed by the Cybermen.

Then comes episode three, and we get what is frankly a happy accident - William Hartnell falls ill, and is abruptly written out of the episode. Not that I don't like Hartnell. Hartnell is absolutely fantastic. But given that he's already being pushed to the margins of this story (as he has been for

several stories in a row), having him actually drop out entirely is, ironically, the best thing that could happen to his character. When the Doctor is present but sidelined, he appears to be a weak character, but as soon as he is actually removed from the narrative we realize something we haven't been able to see clearly in some time - we do actually need him.

I said that *The War Machines* is the second biggest antecedent to this story, and left it deliberately vague what the biggest one is. But since this is the last Hartnell story, there's never going to be a better time to dust off the Hartnell's Greatest Hits reel, so let's go ahead talk about The Chase. You may recall that I created an elaborate interpretation there based on the idea of narrative collapse - i.e. that the Daleks are not merely threatening the lives of the TARDIS crew, they're threatening the entire ability to tell Doctor Who stories. It's a very interesting mode of storytelling, and one that Doctor Who is very good at, because it is basically the only mode of fictional storytelling where the stakes in the story are actually stakes that directly impact the audience. If the audience is watching, presumably it is because they like the show they are watching. So if you threaten to destroy not some alien colony or a single character on the show but the very means of storytelling in the show, that's a real threat.

The problem is, with *The Chase*, it's never quite possible to tell whether the narrative collapse reading is a fun deconstruction or what's actually going on (and I largely suspect it is the former, though it's a very fun deconstruction and I don't rule out the latter). But here, that's absolutely what is going on. The Cybermen represent a completely different form of humanity, and they have a real ability to impose that new vision upon us. It is not merely that they are going to destroy all humans. That would be a scheme that is clearly not going to happen. Rather, it is that they are going to destroy the basic idea of humanity and replace it with something else.

So when the Doctor and his companions are increasingly pushed to the fringes of the story, and then when the Doctor drops out of the story entirely, it's scary because suddenly it seems like there are no rules. The tension stops being "how will this Doctor Who story turn out" and instead becomes "wait, what sort of story is this?" Again, to a modern viewer, it's easy to miss this, because we're so convinced we know what kind of story it is - a Cybermen story and a regeneration story. But 1960s viewers wouldn't have known this, and as a result, couldn't possibly have seen it that way.

And suddenly, in amongst all this ratcheting of tension, the Doctor's collapse highlights just how much the show has quietly thrown overboard. Our characters are in the hands of a psychotic American, humanity is confronting its dark mirror and the dark mirror looks better than us, and, for good measure, something called a Z-Bomb is about to be launched and possibly destroy the entire planet. And then the Cybermen land again, and this time they seem a force of nature, marching with calm relentlessness. (Plus there are so many of them! Seven usable costumes! We never have seven of a Doctor Who monster! There might as well be seventy!)

Again, the present screws us over in trying to watch this. We know that the Doctor is absent because an increasingly frail Hartnell fell ill. We know that Hartnell was bullied/eased out of the role over the summer, and that he came back to this as a guest star. We know the entire script was already written to minimize the strain on him. So we view this as an irritation - especially because it means that our last glimpse of Hartnell is a fairly thin scene in episode two, and thus his illness combined with the missing episode four means that we lose out on the end of his tenure. And this becomes part of the overall fan tendency to pretend that Hartnell's regeneration was being built towards over the course of multiple stories.

As we'll see shortly, it wasn't. Yes, there were some murmurings in internal memos that regeneration is simply something that happens ever 500 years or so, but that's markedly not how it's

written. In fact, let's go ahead and formally bust this myth that the Hartnell to Troughton transition is arbitrary. Not that it's the same process as we'll see in later regenerations - it's not, largely because it's not presented as routine. But it is something that happens for a plot-related reason, and that follows specifically from the previous episodes of *The Tenth Planet*.

So, we're up to episode four now. And as it opens, crucially, Hartnell rumbles back into the story full of fury and passion. The strong sense is that he stopped the Z-Bomb (as he was originally scripted to before Ben had to take over) and saved the day. He gets, in other words, the hero's entrance, full of terrible rage. This is absolutely the same man we see at the end of, for instance, *The Family of Blood* - a man who, when put with his back against the wall, roars back even stronger.

But there's a sense that something isn't quite right as well. The Doctor complains of an outside influence effecting him, and murmurs that his body is wearing a bit thin. Still, that is quickly set aside as the Doctor manages to finally completely unhinge General Cutler (who is quickly gunned down) and take over the situation. It's a fantastic sequence, and it's tough to remember when we last saw Hartnell this in control and decisive.

Here's where things get interesting. I mentioned way up at the start of the entry that this story has a global scope. One aspect of that was a set that was used as an office in Geneva, allowing people on the opposite side of the world to comment on and weigh in over the action at the Snowcap base. So we have the Snowcap base - the base under siege by Cybermen - and Geneva, the place far away that is commenting on what goes on at Snowcap. And then, suddenly, a Cyberman shows up in Geneva and kills the characters there. It's a fantastic violation of the rules of the story - because we treated Geneva for so long as a distant location, it seemed safe from the invasion, which was mostly threatening the Snowcap base. So when the Cybermen show up there, it's a decisive sign that things have gotten very bad.

From there, the Doctor says and does something truly strange - he, out of nowhere, deduces that the Cybermen are planning on destroying the Earth. There's little setup for this, and it does not really seem like a rational deduction at all. But it makes sense. Many commentators take this as the point when the Cybermen's interesting motivations go away and they become generic monsters. It's not. Quite the contrary, it's the logical extension of everything we've seen. We've already been told Mondas is draining the Earth's power. In other words, Mondas is effectively a vampiric planet. It and Earth are not peacefully coexistent twins, but parasitic twins, and one of them has to consume the other. So when the Cybermen are accused of being bent on destroying the Earth, it's simply a confirmation that they are the dark mirrors we initially took them for.

Crucially, however, they don't actually change their behavior much. They still offer a peaceful resolution in which humanity just gets converted, and we see people who want to take them up on it. It's only when that's shot down that Plan B - murder everyone so they survive - comes to the fore. But at the end of the day, this is not a straightforward alien invasion at all. If we read the Cybermen as the qlippothic parodies of humanity, this is simply its natural endpoint. They have ascended, and now it is our turn to follow them.

But what's really odd is that the Doctor's re-emergence in the narrative suddenly crumbles. He's taken off to the Cybermen ship, where he immediately starts to feel the effects of Mondas's energy drain, fading by the second as his own energy is sapped by the Cybermen. The Cybermen sweep to center stage again, and the plot becomes about Ben's attempts to hold them off and ensure a stalemate. Which he does, for a while. And then...

Mondas explodes. Pretty much out of nowhere. And the Cybermen explode with it, suddenly becoming withered plastic shells of people (much like they alway were). Humanity is safe, not

because it saved itself, but because it lasted long enough that Mondas destroyed itself. The essential conflict between Mondas and Earth, where they are both dark reflections of one another, resolved itself. One world lived, the other died, and that was that. Game over, back to the TARDIS, on to another adventure.

And again, now we complain. The Cybermen just disintegrated. There's no satisfying resolution. We've been cheated. All the good ideas of this story have turned rubbish and disappointing.

Nope. Not at all. Remember, in The Chase, that the Doctor ultimately defeats the Daleks by luck. Eventually the Mechanoids happen by and kill all the Daleks, and he escapes, but at a terrible cost - Ian and Barbara leave him. That's the same resolution we get here. The Doctor manages to hold on long enough that Mondas takes care of itself. But what's the cost?

The answer is chilling. When next we see the Doctor, he is, quite simply, dying. Frail, unable to follow what's going on, and stumbling around, he gathers himself up and says he needs to return to the TARDIS, telling his companions to keep warm. It's scary. Something is clearly wrong here. The qlippothic energy of Mondas has spared the world, but...

It hasn't spared the Doctor. He's been drained too far. Perhaps because he's old and his body is wearing thin, but this adventure was simply too much for him. Being drained of life energy by a hideous parody of humanity was fatal.

And so when we return to the TARDIS with Ben and Polly, we see something terrifying.

Back in *The Chase*, we formulated the basic rules of the narrative collapse story. The entire storytelling apparatus of Doctor Who is threatened, then it spontaneously reforms itself, but at some cost. And the cost is this: Doctor Who gets cancelled.

What that means changes from time to time. Certainly the Doctor Who we knew from the first two seasons - the one that did weird, inventive experimental theater, pseudo-Shakespearean comedies, and existentialist drama in rapid succession - went away with Ian and Barbara. But that's a subtle change to what we get here. We've been talking about how the format is changing out from under William Hartnell, and here that becomes inexorable.

And this is part of being a Doctor Who fan. You are absolutely guaranteed to see the show die in front of you, and then get replaced with a strange, different show using the same name. Eventually, everything that Doctor Who is comes to a crashing halt and something new happens instead. Sometimes it's wonderful. Sometimes it's heartbreaking. But it's inevitable. It's why one of the few sections of fandom I get actively angry at are the "bring back David Tennant" crowd. Because, frankly, you only got David Tennant because nine previous versions of the show got cancelled. You knew your turn would come. You don't get to pull a version of the show other people enjoy away from them and replace it with your own. If you did, we'd bring Ian, Barbara, and the Doctor back.

Yes. The Doctor. Because what is about to happen is not the end of the First Doctor's tenure. No. It's the end of the Doctor. William Hartnell only played the First Doctor once, in 1973. Otherwise, he was always simply the Doctor - playing the part for an audience that had no idea anybody else could be the Doctor. And what is about to happen is not the replacement of the first version with the second. It's the replacement of the only version with something completely new.

And we know that the moment Ben and Polly return to the TARDIS, as the Doctor, silently, desperately, flings switches around while other switches flick on and off themselves. And the TARDIS screams. That's the only way to describe it - harsh, metallic noises unlike anything we've seen the ship make. It's scary. It's scary in a way not even *An Unearthly Child* tried to make it.

And we know why it's happened. It's happened because the Doctor came into contact with horrible, qlippothic forces. It happened because the Doctor encountered these horrible, dark parodies

of humanity. And the question we have to ask is, what has happened to him? Because suddenly, he collapses. He collapses, and we can see it. In the past, we've seen some man in a silly wig fall over from behind. It's a bit of a joke, spotting the lame Hartnell duplicates. But this is unmistakably William Hartnell crumpled on the ground. The Doctor. Our Doctor. The silly old wizard with a terrible fire within.

Dying on the ground of his magic box, which screams around him.

He doesn't get last words. He just dies. And we know why. We know full well it is Mondas that destroyed him. That his energy was drained by that monstrous other world. And it's stark and horrific. It's the sort of cosmic, psychological horror we associate with Lovecraft - that this dark, qlippothic energy stalks the universe like a cosmological vampire and has now taken our hero away form us.

And as the TARDIS dematerialization sounds, now harsh and mechanical and scary like it hasn't been for three years, the Doctor fades away, and some new face sits where he used to be.

And here is where our second error happens. Just as we misread the Cybermen, who in fact never reappear after *The Tenth Planet*, although their name and home planet are recycled for some very silly looking robots, we misread regeneration. We know what happens at the end of this episode, and it's almost comforting to us - here comes Troughton! He's fun!

That's not what we're watching. Not even a little bit. This is not the rise of the Second Doctor. It is nothing whatsoever except the death of the Doctor. The only Doctor. And we forget that. We forget that the Hartnell era goes out on an astonishingly bleak cliffhanger, that *The Tenth Planet* feeds directly into *The Power of the Daleks* a week later, and that all of this is terrifying, not a triumphant moment of the show's history. We treat this scene as something that ends the book on an era. And it is that, but it is so much more.

Yeah, this entry marks the end of a major period of Doctor Who. But for all of that, the Troughton era also dovetails right off the end of this, and it's going to be important when reading about the start of his era to forget everything you think you know about this show. Because Doctor Who is over. The Doctor is dead. The horrible plastic monsters offering a grotesque parody of spiritual enlightenment have destroyed him, and replaced him with something else, just as they wanted to replace us with them. The operating assumption, given that the Cybermen wanted to help us ascend to be like them, and given that the Cybermen did in fact kill the Doctor, that he is now going to "ascend." And whatever this terrible, awful man who replaced the Doctor is, the odds are very, very poor that it's going to be a good thing.

Look How Cool This Stuff Is (*The Enemy of the World*)

Perhaps the biggest pleasure in working through *TARDIS Eruditorum* was properly discovering the work of David Whitaker. Whitaker was Doctor Who's first script editor, did much of the actual work on things like the Dalek annuals, and was responsible for writing Patrick Troughton's first story. His fascination with alchemy as a theme became, over time, one of the blog's main ideas. But for my money, *The Enemy of the World* is the story of his I love the most, just for its sheer and unbridled giddy charm.

It's not, however, one of his best loved stories. This is in part because he did a pair of better-known Dalek stories, but still is disappointing. But another one of the big pleasures of *TARDIS Eruditorum* is having a soap box from which to sing the praises of under-appreciated stories, and *The Enemy of the World* is one of my favorites in that regard. Were I to pick one missing story for recovery I'd defer to consensus and pick *Power of the Daleks*. But were I to get two, I'd save *Enemy of the World* without looking back.

Which is to say that it's also the one story in this book that's mostly missing episodes, which is always a bit strange to deal with. In actuality the reconstructions of missing episodes are quite good and watchable, and you can get an experience that's at least reasonably like watching television. It's still sad to lose the details of performances, especially in a story like this where so much comes out of Patrick Troughton being a brilliant actor. But even with five of its six episodes missing *The Enemy of the World* is an absolute blast to watch.

It's December 23, 1967. The Beatles are at number one with "Hello Goodbye," and also at number three with the *Magical Mystery Tour* EP, which, being an EP, is charted as a single instead of an album. They'll hold number one for five weeks, reiterating the vague tendency for creativity in Doctor Who and The Beatles to coincide. At week six, as the season's one experiment with something other than bases under siege occurs, the bottom falls out and Georgie Fame takes over with "The Ballad of Bonnie and Clyde." In the meantime The Monkees chart with "Daydream Believer," as do Cliff Richard, Tom Jones, The Four Tops, and Engelbert Humperdinck.

In terms of news, we have the first use of the term "black hole," one of the pieces of science most friendly to science fiction. Prime Minister Wilson endorses the "I'm Backing Britain" campaign asking people to work an extra half hour without pay, which ends up being a complete turkey. The Prague Spring gets underway, which is a bit unusual given that it's January. And the Vietnam War keeps it up.

While on television we have *The Enemy of the World*, an appallingly overlooked story that I am just going to evangelize about shamelessly for an entire essay. It is, in fact, one of the all-time greats of the series. It is a criminal offense that there are people who think of this as the red-headed stepchild of Season Five and prefer the monster stories. This story is absolutely incredible, light years ahead of its time, and still fantastic to this day. I'm honestly at a loss for why this does not have the wild and ecstatic praise reserved for it that *Marco Polo* or *The Massacre* have, both of which it runs rings around. I'll take it as a given that it's never going to attain the luster of *The Tomb of the Cybermen*, if only because there are people who stubbornly refuse to like anything without monsters in it and because few people watch reconstructions, which means that the missing stories not already recognized as classics have a tough time emerging. But there's really no excuse for it not being recognized by those who have seen it as an absolute triumph. Because it is. This story belongs on the

list with things like *City of Death, Caves of Androzani, Doomsday*, and *Blink*. It's that good.

Let's start with what everybody thinks this story is. The default capsule summary of this story is that it's another in an oddly long line of identical duplicate stories that Doctor Who does in which an actor gets to play two parts—the first, of course, being *The Massacre*. This time Patrick Troughton gets to pull double duty as both the Doctor and the villainous Salamander. The second thing that everybody knows about this story is that it's "Doctor Who Does James Bond." This should not be a surprise to us today, when the default mode of Doctor Who is "Doctor Who does X" where X is some other genre. The third, and probably the clue to why it's so good, is that David Whitaker wrote it.

The James Bond comparison is apt, at least for the first episode. Whitaker, in fact, holds to the James Bond paradigm we have already discussed, dropping an action-based cliffhanger every five minutes for the first fifteen minutes of the story as the Doctor, Jamie, and Victoria are chased by hovercraft and helicopter, and then, for good measure, attacked by gunmen. This is clever—far cleverer than just using some James Bond trappings. Whitaker begins by mimicking the structure of a James Bond movie, then dropping the Doctor into it. But then he pulls his first grand trick by having Troughton play the Bond villain.

There are two important aspects of a setup like this that Whitaker takes advantage of, and it's going to be helpful to spell them out. The first is one that Doctor Who and particularly Whitaker have been adept at for a while—the idea of delaying the most obviously appealing part of the setup. In this case it's the direct collision of the Doctor with the James Bond genre. The audience wants to see what happens when the Doctor gets into a James Bond-style mess. More to the point, the audience wants to see the Troughton's two characters face off. Whitaker, unlike a lot of writers, is good at this sort of setup. For another writer, presenting the audience with six episodes in which the payoff at the final episode is clear from the end of the first would be a train wreck—and indeed, for more than one writer, it has been. But here, perhaps spurred on by his own irritation at getting screwed by pacing in *The Evil of the Daleks*, Whitaker makes sure the pacing of this story absolutely sings.

The other major aspect is absolutely crucial to this story and to Whitaker's overall conception of the Doctor; Whitaker's Doctor, as we've discussed, is a mercurial figure, not just in the banal sense of being eccentric and clownish, but in the alchemical sense. The Doctor is an overtly transgressive figure who cuts against settings, bringing an anarchic subversion wherever he is placed. The pleasure implied by the Doctor being put through a James Bond-style plot isn't just seeing the James Bond material but seeing how the Doctor is going to subvert it. Mercury, in Whitaker's alchemical conception, is an element associated with change and transformation. And so the audience, with a setup like this, is expecting the Doctor to change the James Bond narrative, or, more specifically, to break the rules of it. But in this case we have something extra—Salamander, who serves ambiguously as a second Doctor. On the one hand he does not appear to be mercurial—indeed, he seems positively saturnine. On the other, he is explicitly a mirror of the Doctor. Everything that happens over the course of the six episodes is based on these two aspects—the idea of the Doctor as a force that breaks the rules of a narrative and the desire to see the Doctor and the James Bond narrative collide.

The first thing this helps explain in the story is the cliffhangers, all of which are very, very strange. Virtually all of them consist of characters learning pieces of information, generally ones the audience already knows, but being in no immediate danger. The first and weirdest of these is the one at the end of the first episode—a strong contender for the strangest cliffhanger of the classic series.

OK. So the Doctor and company get taken in by Giles Kent—the sympathetic ally and James Bond stock character, and by Astrid, his assistant/Bond girl. It's established that the Doctor and Salamander are dead ringers for one another, and then Salamander's security forces show up, forcing

the Doctor to duck into a bathroom and attempt an impersonation of Salamander. The thing is, Salamander is Mexican. (Indeed, in one of the few somewhat tacky bits of the story, Troughton plays him slightly blacked up. That said, we should probably also remark on the way in which blackening makeup worked in black-and-white television compared to color, namely that it's considerably more convincing. Salamander is played blacked up, but he is in no way played as a stereotypical or "minstrely" character.) And so part of impersonating Salamander means doing his accent.

I've talked before about Troughton's counterintuitive but brilliant line readings. Here he outdoes himself. It is important to remember, first and foremost, that Salamander is also played by Troughton. Troughton, in other words, can do the voice perfectly—it's his voice, after all. (The voice is not so much a Mexican accent as a generic "foreign" accent that softens the racial elements of the character.) But Troughton opts to ply the Doctor's imitation as a botched imitation, striding out and confidently greeting Bruce the security guard in the worst Mexican accent imaginable. This is, on its own merits, already a strange and sublimely weird moment. But then to have that be the cliffhanger—on an episode that has featured fifteen minutes of tense vehicle chases—is simply mind-wrenching. It's a classic case of using cliffhangers to signal changes in direction of the story, instead of just to put the characters in danger (which gets farcical rapidly—the preceding story has an absolutely ludicrous cliffhanger in which the Doctor is given the choice of answering the question "Who are you" or being exploded. In a move that I am sure shocked every single viewer, he answered the question next episode), and Whitaker does it for the whole story. But these cliffhangers get at what Whitaker's story is actually about. It's not a story about the chases and thrills as such, but a story about what kind of story it is. And so these cliffhangers, as characters get information that changes their understanding of their world, are effective precisely because they suggest that the basic shape of the story could change at any moment.

Here we also get at another aspect of Whitaker's cleverness. He may be playing with the James Bond structure, but he's built himself a much more mature and interesting world than *You Only Live Twice* bothers with. This is, as Miles and Wood point out, a world more akin to Roman court intrigue, with complex double and triple crosses going on all over the place. It apes the style of James Bond, but structurally it's a far more complex world than James Bond. What this means is that the nature of the inevitable subversion of the world isn't straightforwardly obvious. As characters' places in the world shift around due to the cliffhanger revelations the nature of the eventual explosion when it all comes together shifts too.

The only problem is that Whitaker has to fit four episodes worth of material between this setup and the final episode in which the Doctor can finally confront Salamander. I say "problem," but what I should really say is "opportunity for sheer genius." Because what he does is meticulously go through all of the lesser elements people would want in a setup like this. For instance, one of the things that this premise eventually requires is, as I said, putting the Doctor into the James Bond action. So what Whitaker does is send Jamie and Victoria halfway across the planet to do an espionage plot in order to prove that Salamander is a bad guy. This makes perfect sense. Yes, we want to see the Doctor in the James Bond plot, but Jamie McCrimmon, 007 is a solid idea too. That gives us the second episode, and manages to simultaneously tease the viewer with what the eventual injection of the Doctor into it will be while still giving them something they want to see.

Then comes the third episode—the surviving episode, and probably the reason this story doesn't have the reputation it should. Not that it's bad—it's actually absolutely brilliant—but it makes no sense out of context. This is mainly because it is in part a repudiation of the entire rest of the season, and in particular a response to many of the problems I observed about *The Ice Warriors*.

See, Whitaker, we have to remember, is an old pro. He had a hand in the first season and change, and has written three stories since he left. That includes lots of historicals that he either wrote or script edited. And so he has some experience in the task of "depict a culture thoroughly in Doctor Who." This relatively new problem where Doctor Who ignores ordinary people in favor of strictly tracking heroic figures in a story was not a trap Whitaker fell into. Look at how, in a story like The Crusade, the characters get split into their own plotlines so that different aspects of the society are presented. (Or, for ones Whitaker merely edited, *The Aztecs* and *The Reign of Terror*.) So Whitaker, I am willing to bet, noticed the way in which ordinary people were being increasingly marginalized by the series—especially given the lack of an audience identification character among the leads. And, more to the point, I'm willing to bet that Whitaker saw that as a falling off from what the series should do with its settings.

So what Whitaker manages to do is contrive to send Jamie and Victoria into Salamander's kitchen for an episode where they try to pry information about Salamander from his food taster, Fariah. Fariah is notable as the show's first black female character, and, more to the point, she's an extremely strong character in her own right—it will be a long time before Doctor Who does a black character of any gender this well again. The second episode manages a clever bit where it initially looks like she'll be a miserable serving girl, then slowly reveals that she's actually quite an important character and a strong woman until, when she dies in the fourth episode, it's genuinely upsetting because of how good a character she was. But the point of the third episode is not primarily Fariah, but a character who debuts in it and appears only in it—Griffin the Chef.

It's tough to quite explain Griffin the Chef. Basically, he's a character who has absolutely no stake in any of this "save the world from the evil dictator" business, dislikes everybody, and just wants to be left alone to cook, which he does very well in spite of the fact that virtually every other sentence out of his mouth is an observation about how bad his food is and how he's going to get fired or executed for it. Basically, he's a comic relief character. But he benefits tremendously from actually being genuinely funny. More to the point, however, he's exactly what so many of the past few stories have been lacking—a regular person. Griffin is in the story so that we have the perspective of an ordinary guy who just wants to manage to survive this insane world where people routinely poison and shoot each other. And it's absolutely wonderful. Griffin steals every scene he's in, and the inclusion of the third episode is a huge part of what elevates *The Enemy of the World* from "quite good adventure" to "sublimely good story." Because it—especially after the second episode, which is all about selling the global scope of this story with characters and action jumping across continents—goes miles towards making us actually see the whole world that Salamander is the enemy of. It's not, in this case, an expected pleasure. But it's crucial to what Whitaker does because it bothers to firmly establish the milieu in its own right and goes further than anything else in the story to make the question of its mercurial subversion substantive.

It is worth noting, however, that Whitaker still has two episodes of padding to manage before he can get to his big payoff. And the obvious things to do are rapidly running out. We have a sense of the mundane world, we have a sense of the scale, and we've seen the companions try and fail to be James Bond; there's nothing left but to finally unleash the Doctor onto the James Bond narrative so we can see his anarchic glee completely overturn all the tropes of the genre. What can Whitaker possibly do?

The answer is quite possibly the most mind-wrenching reveal in the history of Doctor Who. See, at this point, Whitaker conspicuously leaves the Doctor on the sidelines of the story to demand more evidence of Salamander's evil before he acts. The show has set up our expectations very clearly here. Eventually the anarchic force that is the Doctor will enter the James Bond narrative and mess it up in

brilliant ways. The evil Salamander will get his comeuppance in a confrontation scene, and everyone will go home. Salamander, though played by Troughton, has had three episodes in which he has not appeared in the least bit mercurial. He's a very standard James Bond villain. By this point in the story the contours are relatively clear—the only question is to see exactly what ways the Doctor is going to mess things up.

Given that, the fourth episode is quite a surprise. First of all, both Frazer Hines and Deborah Watling get the week off, leaving Troughton as the only regular in this episode. That's already an odd decision. On top of that, Troughton spends the lion's share of the episode as Salamander, so the Doctor is hardly in it. This is practically Mission to the Unknown in terms of how absent the regulars are. So instead of bringing the Doctor to the action, the show frustrates that desire further. Thus far, this sounds like a train wreck. Except for the third bizarre thing Whitaker does.

See, thus far we have a pretty standard James Bond plot. Salamander has technology that helps grow food, and appears to be both murdering people and causing natural disasters to slowly rise to power over the whole world. All of this makes sense. He's a bog standard James Bond villain. So the absolute last thing we expect at this point is for Salamander to pull the Doctor's trick of breaking the rules of the narrative he's in. On the other hand, Salamander is still a mirror of the Doctor. And so Whitaker, having made that thread seem thoroughly remote, does not so much pull on it as yank on it so hard that the entire story unravels before our eyes. Salamander literally slips out the back door of the James Bond plot, entering his mysterious "records room" that nobody else is allowed into and suddenly ducking out into another story entirely. See, it turns out that Salamander has had a bunch of technicians stored away in an underground bunker, and has convinced them all that there was a terrible nuclear war up on the surface and that they have to hide down there and orchestrate natural disasters for him so he can defeat the last armies and render the planet habitable again.

This may sound stupid, but there's one other detail—the bunker full of people is basically a bunch of grumpy British people. After a story full of exotic names and foreign locales, the bunker consists of people with common British names playing their parts in their native accents. In other words, as Rob Shearman (who I'm surprised ends up kind of neutral on this story, as it seems so very much up his alley) points out in *Running Through Corridors*, "Having shown us a world stage which is so relentlessly cold, he now wrongfoots us by presenting the people who've so passively allowed that world to come into being—and they're not Eastern Europeans hiding behind exotic names. They're us."

What Shearman doesn't give Whitaker nearly enough credit for is this—months before the end of *The Prisoner* has actually been seen, he's managed to stick a gigantic pin in the entire premise of that show. *The Prisoner* is, after all, about an insane world with an illusion of normalcy hidden within the real world. And in its final episode, part of the point is the inescapability of the Village and the idea that there isn't actually an "outside" to it. Whitaker is offering a very droll undercutting of this premise by having us suddenly stumble upon a Village-like structure inside a James Bond story. By doing this, he points out one of the tricks that allows *The Prisoner* to work, namely that the Village can only function because of the series' implied connection to McGoohan's previous series. The Village only makes sense because it's not hidden in the real world, it's hidden inside what we assume to be the crazy James Bond world of Danger Man. It's far easier to have a blurry boundary on the Village when the world outside it is as fundamentally insane and fictional as the world inside it. But on top of this, Whitaker has just spent the previous episode making his world less insane and fictional. It may be full of James Bond stock characters, but there's a real texture to the world that cuts against the idea that there might be something like the Village in it. Salamander, it turns out, has

been hiding a whole other story inside the James Bond plot.

But what's really brilliant about what Whitaker does here is that it completely changes how the end of the story goes. By the time in the fifth episode that the Doctor finally gets around to intervening in the James Bond plot it's already been subverted by Salamander. This is deceptively clever. Whitaker has made us wait for four episodes to see the Doctor get to play in a James Bond story, and by the time the Doctor finally gets there, the main villain of that story has already shown himself to be far more than just another Bond villain, and in fact has shown himself to be a mercurial character who subverts narratives as well.

This means that Whitaker can get away with a resolution that is different and more interesting than he's been setting us up for. Because the Bond villain has already breached the narrative, Whitaker is much freer to do as he pleases in letting the Doctor into it. And so when Salamander's security forces swarm Kent's compound, setting off a Bond-like showdown, Whitaker can have the Doctor completely defuse it and point out that everybody is insane—a far more drastic action than he could have pulled off previously.

But Whitaker resists the temptation to simply turn this story into an out-and-out parody of James Bond stories—although that is one of the things the story does. Instead, he lets one of the Bond characters—an intermediate henchman named Benik—become a truly terrifying figure, menacing Jamie and Victoria in an overtly creepy and sexualized way, and chillingly admitting to being a simple sadist who just likes to hurt people. Yes, eventually the Doctor barges in and defuses the situation with a Salamander impersonation, but Whitaker lets the scene run long enough to be deeply unsettling, and even when the Doctor arrives, he continues his Salamander impersonation with Jamie and Victoria in order to demonstrate how genuinely afraid of Salamander they are and thus how evil he must be, pulling the task off so well that he has trouble convincing Jamie and Victoria later that it's him via a cute variation on one of Troughton's trademarks, with the Doctor searching for his recorder to prove that he's himself and finally just miming a recorder performance as proof. This is quintessentially Whitaker, with his far more ambiguous and inhuman characterization of the Doctor as someone willing to push and manipulate his friends if he needs to.

So by the time we get to the sixth episode, all Whitaker really has to do is run down the checklist of big confrontations and get us to the end. Or at least, that's what we would think if it weren't for the fact that Whitaker uses his last cliffhanger to throw yet another curveball, with Astrid stumbling upon Salamander's underground bunker, thus connecting two parts of the narrative—the James Bond setup that got the Doctor into it and the late game subversion of the James Bond narrative—that the audience surely did not expect to see connected. Once Salamander has torn down the James Bond plot the last thing the audience would be expecting is for the Bond girl to get pulled into Salamander's subverted plot.

So when the big face-offs that the story has been promising the audience get going in the sixth episode all bets are off. Whitaker has spent five whole episodes making it so that we truly don't know what kind of story this is or who has power within it. And so every confrontation bristles with potential and tension. The Doctor faces down Benik again. Astrid the Bond girl faces down Salamander's secret Britain. The companions face down the dumb Bond henchmen. (OK, that last one is a bit of a snide comment on Whitaker's part, perhaps.) We know how all of these should go in a story that follows the expected set of rules, yes. But we don't know whether that's the type of story we're watching.

Which means that Whitaker can pull another big twist and reveal that Kent has secretly been a Bond villain the entire time, and that he was originally in league with Salamander on this whole

"secret bunker causing natural disasters" thing. And the Doctor has known this all along, and that's why he's been so reluctant to help Kent. Aside from being a beautiful lampshading of this story's biggest flaw—the degree to which the Doctor delays getting to the action—this sequence and the resultant confrontation between Kent and Salamander reiterates a key point—Salamander is smarter than this narrative too. He is every bit the evil Doctor and a proto-Master, and he even gets a nice Mastery laugh in after killing Kent. Kent tries subverting the James Bond narrative by being a secret double agent, and he gets cut down by Salamander largely because Salamander has already become so much bigger than the mere James Bond antics Kent is playing at.

What this means is that there are huge expectations for the big one. It means that when Salamander and the Doctor finally do face off, it's going to have to be epic. And for a lot of people, the story fails at this. Those people are wrong. Generally, their objection is that this final confrontation scene is too abrupt and too tacked on. I will grant that it is surprisingly short, apparently because the effect needed to get Troughton on the screen twice proved much more difficult than expected. But what these commentators miss—and it's an easy thing to miss when you're as used to later Doctor Who as anyone who goes and watches reconstructions of Troughton episodes is—is that Salamander has done something we've never seen done before: he's breached the TARDIS.

Other than a brief incursion from a Zarbi way back in *The Web Planet*, the TARDIS has been sacrosanct. Sure, it might get stolen, batted around, or, in *The Tenth Planet*, mildly possessed. But no villain has ever just strode into the TARDIS and tried to steal it. The TARDIS has always been completely safe. And Salamander gets within a few inches of stealing it. Never mind how brief the scene is, or the strange question of how Salamander found the TARDIS. (It's a David Whitaker script. As always, we deal with symbols, not reality.) The jaw-dropping thing is that he's there, and he attacks the Doctor inside his own ship.

Again, this follows perfectly from the setup. Salamander is capable of transgressing against the narrative just as the Doctor is, and steadily breaks the story from its James Bond narrative. The obvious follow-up is that he should finish by turning around and trying to break the Doctor's story as well. That's the appeal of a villain who can transgress against narratives—the villain is able to threaten the Doctor with narrative collapse. Once you set up the idea of an exact counterpart of the Doctor, you have to let him face the Doctor on the Doctor's home turf. If the counterpart isn't a strong enough character to threaten the Doctor in the TARDIS itself, he's not a strong enough character period.

Yes, venting Salamander out into the Void is a bit abrupt. (Although if you look at the start of The Web of Fear, it spends a few minutes wrapping this up and then moves on to an unrelated plot. Watching the first episode and seeing how little the first scene has to do with the rest of it in any way, shape, or form, one frankly gets the sense that Whitaker's episode overran and that they tacked the last few minutes of his onto the start of *The Web of Fear*.) But on the other hand, this is, again, David Whitaker. He created the TARDIS as we know her way back in *The Edge of Destruction*. He established her as the fundamental reason why the Doctor's alchemy is superior to the Daleks'. So having the TARDIS herself destroy Salamander is wholly appropriate. He may be able to nearly trump and beat out the Doctor in his own story, but the one thing he cannot hope to compete with is the magical box itself. Just as the TARDIS justifies the Doctor's triumph over the Daleks, so too is it able to redress the narrative imbalance threatened by a second Doctor in the story. The TARDIS becomes Doctor Who's trump card—the thing that protects the narrative from all danger.

The result is sublime. A story that starts seeming like a James Bond pastiche and ends up delivering a commentary on James Bond, *The Prisoner*, and Doctor Who, has some sublimely weird

and mind-blowing double crosses in the final act, and gives us more of a sense of a world than we've gotten out of Doctor Who in months. It also lets Patrick Troughton really stretch his acting chops. It's proof that Doctor Who still can do anything, assuming it's allowed to try. *The Enemy of the World* is a story that starts looking positively mundane, ends up with its villain nearly threatening the entire narrative structure of Doctor Who, and stops off at Griffin the Chef on the way. It's magnificent, and it's high time we started treating it as the absolute classic it is.

We're All Stories in the End (*The Mind Robber*)

This was the last post I banged out before a vacation to London. I built most of it up around a single line - Gulliver's line where he calls the Doctor a traitor - and worried that I had a fan theory that was just a bit too twee to get away with. I expanded it a bunch while in a hotel in Cheltenham, where I went to hear Alan Moore give a talk. The hotel was this bizarre piece of Scandanavian ultra-modernism, and Internet access could only be bought in two hour chunks, so instead of screwing around online I had nothing to do but write and watch *The Invasion*, both of which I did a lot of.

This seemed to me good, as I thought, in hindsight, that the post was way too precious and was just an obviously wrong interpretation that sounded neat. I don't remember what I changed, though if past (and future) behavior is any indication, it probably meant adding stuff instead of sensibly cutting it down. (I am the sort of person the phrase "needs an editor" was made for.)

It was my first post to be a massive hit, and it took ages for it to be unseated as my most-read post ever. Secretly, between you and me, I think it's a bit precious, and that it comes perilously close to just being an obviously wrong interpretation in the *Room 237* mould. But somehow, against my better judgment, I seem to be widely considered to have gotten away with it.

I'm almost the exact wrong person to speculate as to why, but I suspect it is because it sneaks in through the closing window of time before Doctor Who had an origin story and provides one that is ever so slightly more honest than the one we got.

It's September 14, 1968. In our traditional sign of some sort of restoration of order, The Beatles are at number one with "Hey Jude." They are unseated two weeks later by a signing to their own record label, Mary Hopkin, a British folk singer, who holds the number one slot with "Those Were the Days" for the remainder of this story. The Bee Gees, The Beach Boys, and Johnny Nash all also chart. As do Amen Corner with "High in the Sky," a song I've not heard of, but that lingers around at number ten for an absolutely terrifyingly long time and so seemed worth commenting on.

In news that doesn't sing, the Apollo missions get closer and closer to the moon with their first manned launch, Apollo 7. The merger between General Electric Company (no relation to the American company General Electric) and English Electric is the biggest merger in UK history. There's a lovely revolution in Panama. And, most significantly, in the one major bit of 1968 catastrophe to hit the UK, rioting breaks out following a civil rights march in Derry, leading to the twenty years of tension and terrorism between the UK and Ireland known as The Troubles.

While on television we have, thankfully, the exact story we needed after the grotesque train wreck that was *The Dominators*. *The Mind Robber* is a thing of absolute beauty. If *The Dominators* was the complete breakdown of all heart, soul, and ethics in the series, *The Mind Robber* is, more even than *The Power of the Daleks*, a story that is about establishing Doctor Who as an unending story. It's a story that is not just delightful to watch, but a story that watching gives one a constant, triumphant sense of right—a sense that this is how and what Doctor Who was always supposed to be.

Even the basic idea has a delightful sense of properness. The basic idea is that, following a TARDIS malfunction, the Doctor, Jamie, and Zoe get caught in the Land of Fiction, a realm in which stories are real. The title, which is admittedly intensely marginal with relation to the rest, refers to the Master of the Land of Fiction, who has apparently lured the Doctor there in order to get him to run things.

Much has been made of many of the obvious aspects of this story. The intertextuality, the degree

to which this represents Doctor Who acknowledging a longstanding debt to a tradition of British children's literature, the pleasant and inventive surrealism—all of these are well-worn topics that you can see covered in almost any book on the series. Even if you go for criticism from third generation fandom—things like *Running Through Corridors* or *About Time*—most of what you get are acknowledgments of how brilliant this story is. And it is absolutely brilliant—a story with more creativity, and more of a sense of joy than anything else in the Troughton era.

But that's all been said well enough. So let's, as we try to do here, find some new things to say about *The Mind Robber*. First, I want to talk about a specific approach to Doctor Who that *The Mind Robber* is a particularly key moment in. Because for all the seeming radicalness of this story, it's considerably less of a departure from past stories than one might think. The most obvious place to look towards this is its first episode—a charming piece of surrealism hastily written by script editor Derrick Sherwin to deal with the fact that *The Dominators* packed it in an episode early and thus that *The Mind Robber* needed to expand from its original four-episode conception. This was enormously fortunate for the story. The four episodes of *The Mind Robber* that were originally intended are delightful, but the addition of a real avant-garde piece at the head that serves as a more dramatic break from what had come before. (The story is one that benefits from a couple moments of odd luck. The sudden illness of Frazer Hines which required his being replaced by his cousin Hamish Wilson for two episodes resulted in a wonderfully disturbing sequence in which the Doctor tries to assemble Jamie's lost face from a set of cut-outs and gets it wrong, temporarily giving Jamie a new face. There is relatively little of the Troughton era that I remember watching as a child, but that scene stuck vividly with me.)

But ironically, the addition of a self-consciously weird episode meant that the story got more grounded in the past of the program as well. Sherwin ended up doing an episode whose sets consisted of the TARDIS and a white void. This meant a lot of TARDIS material, and at this point in the series the TARDIS was largely David Whitaker's baby. Which means that the David Whitaker-style conception of the TARDIS makes an unexpected appearance in a non-Whitaker story. The first episode involves mercury fluid links, sticky switches, bizarre TARDIS control mechanisms, and other classic elements of Whitaker science. We've talked about the nature of Whitaker's alchemical conception of the series before, most notably in *The Evil of the Daleks* entry, but it's worth reiterating the basics. The biggest one is that in alchemy, the symbol and the object are considered to be interchangeable. Furthermore, the Doctor and the TARDIS are clearly associated with mercury, one of the most powerful elemental symbols. (Alchemy as a spiritual practice paid great heed to a syncresis of Hermes and Thoth called Hermes Trismegistus.)

The reappearance of the mercury links, in other words, is not just a callback to *The Wheel in Space*. It's also an invocation of a specific view of the Doctor's identity—one in which one of the most important things to know is that symbols have real power. There's a longstanding debate about Doctor Who as to whether it is really science fiction, or if it's better classified as some form of fantasy. Miles and Wood go to great lengths to arbitrate this, coming up with one of the best distinctions between science fiction and fantasy I've ever seen. Science fiction, they argue, is about man's relationship with his tools, whereas fantasy is about man's relationship with symbols and language.

Whatever its scientific trappings, under this definition it's fairly clear that Doctor Who's sympathies lie more with fantasy, as it's shot through with discussions of symbols. We'll look at the earliest example later, but it extends to the present day. Steven Moffat's first season on the show is a prime example. Look at the depiction of the Weeping Angels in *The Time of Angels*. The idea that "an

image of an Angel is itself an Angel" makes no sense as a concept extending from any science. It's purely an alchemical concept—the idea that symbols of the Angels are equivalent to the beings themselves. This is made clearest in one of the most overlooked, creepy lines in the entire series. "What if our thoughts could think for themselves? What if our dreams no longer needed us? When these things occur and are held to be true, the time will be upon us. The time of Angels." In other words, the Angels arose because they were thought of. They stepped out of our dreams and into the world. They are not science, but magic through and through. They are symbols with power. In other words, they are direct evolutions of David Whitaker's Doctor Who. (The resolution of *The Big Bang* takes this even further, in particular the monologue I lifted this entry title from, but that's a topic for another book.)

This is, as is surely clear to anyone who has read this book thus far, the approach to the show that I love most. And *The Mind Robber* is a landmark story in this regard. For one thing, it makes it one hundred percent canonical in the world of Doctor Who that ideas are real. There is a Land of Fiction where things that were created in people's minds have real form. That's a big deal in and of itself. But if we look more closely at *The Mind Robber*, its implications for Doctor Who at large become even bigger.

Let's go back to the Master of the Land of Fiction's plan. He wants the Doctor to take over running the Land of Fiction, and has apparently plucked him from the universe and lured him there for the task. Why? This is actually a very good question. The incumbent Master of the Land of Fiction is a writer of a pulp schoolboy serial (and, Miles and Wood argue, a thinly veiled Charles Hamilton, though the veil here is at least thicker than the last thinly veiled thing related to Hamilton). It's made clear that it's his creativity and ability to write that holds the thing together. So why on Earth would the Land of Fiction want to sack its writer-Master in favor of the Doctor, a character who has never displayed any particular literary ambition, and who has thus far been coded as a scientist, not an artist?

The clue is in the second episode, in which Gulliver makes a comment that the Doctor is a traitor to the Land of Fiction. What on Earth could that possibly mean? On one level, it's transparent. Like all of Gulliver's lines, it's actually from Jonathan Swift himself. But we are, I think, meant to assume that what he says is true, if oddly phrased. The obvious answer is that the Doctor is originally from the Land of Fiction. In fact, if we take Gulliver's line at face value (and there is admittedly some reason not to, though I think the overall tone of the story suggests that Gulliver is essentially honest, even if the constraint on his dialogue makes him hard to follow at times), the Doctor must hail from the Land of Fiction. After all, you cannot be a traitor to a land you are not from.

Virtually everything in the episode seems to confirm this. For instance, Jamie stumbles upon a ticker tape that is actively creating the adventures of the Doctor and Zoe as they happen. (This leads to the one muffed moment of the story, in which the Doctor and Zoe are menaced by Medusa as Jamie reads about it on ticker tape. The cliffhanger shot is the Doctor and Zoe, when, from a modern perspective, it's clear that the far more bizarrely chilling moment would be to cut back to Jamie and have him read out loud about their horrible fate, then cut to credits.) Or, perhaps more significantly, Jamie and Zoe are at one point made fictional, and the Doctor at one point frets that if he writes himself into the story directly he'll become fictional.

Let's say that again to really stress the weirdness of it. The primary threat in this story is that the characters will become fictional. This is, of course, a brilliant use of existential horror and one of the highlights of the story. But thinking about that from a remotely human perspective, it does not actually make any sense. It's impossible to imagine how someone could ever "become fictional." The only

way in which a person can meaningfully be threatened by fictionality is if they are already a character in a story. In other words, if they are already in some sense fictional and what is going on is not "becoming fiction" but rather "losing realness." After all, the story does establish that fictional characters cannot be destroyed, and at the end, for no explained reason, the Doctor and company survive when the Land of Fiction is destroyed. Why would this be?

The simplest explanation of all of this is that, on some level, the Doctor has always been a part of the Land of Fiction—intended to be its master and controller. And that he escaped. Thematically, this makes sense. Going back to Whitaker's conception of the TARDIS, if we look at how the ship is explained in *An Unearthly Child*, one of the most unusual things about it is that the Doctor explains the TARDIS via the metaphor of television. This recurs in *The Time Meddler*, where the Doctor describes some controls to Steven, all of which are recognizable as television controls. And in *The Chase*, where what kicks off the destabilization of the narrative is the threat that the Doctor might trade in the TARDIS for watching stuff on television. Indeed, the opening credits of the show are done with a technique called howlaround that is based on exploiting and manipulating the technical limits of television signals. And Miles and Wood write several times about how Troughton's Doctor often peers out of television screens, both in the story (as when he appears on a monitor in *The Wheel in Space*) and outside of it, when he looks at the camera itself. And when he looks out, he appears aware of what he is looking at, a consequence of his tendency to play the character from the marginal spaces at the edges of scenes to begin with so that his power is not diminished by his lack of physical presence. The sense is that the Doctor can cross the thin membrane that separates the world behind the screen from the world in front of it.

In other words, since day one the Doctor has been a character who appears to harness the basic power of television. And he has consistently used this power in order to tell stories. He appears to be someone who can create an infinite number of stories. He has, in other words, always fulfilled the role of the Master of the Land of Fiction, except instead of writing stories by sitting on the sidelines he writes them mercurially—by throwing himself into them and creating them through his own existence in them.

Put simply, months before *The War Games, The Mind Robber* has quietly given us an origin story for the Doctor that is almost, but not quite, what we eventually get from the later "official" version. (After all, it is not as though no writer in the first six years had a guess on where the Doctor came from. If I could conjure up David Whitaker and ask him one question, in fact, it would be what he thought the Doctor's origin was.) The Doctor fled from a position of responsibility, stole a spaceship (or, in this case, storytelling medium), and ran off to have adventures. Except that instead of being a Time Lord from Gallifrey, he is the designated Master of the Land of Fiction—the writer and creator of all stories. And he's gone on the run to live the stories instead of simply writing them.

Notably, this never quite gets contradicted, even when this shadow theme of *The Mind Robber* gets revisited as the main plot of the final two episodes of the season. Because the Land of Fiction is outside of the universe, and because the Doctor fled into the universe, he presumably became "real" instead of just fictional. And thus he became something else that served much of the same narrative function; instead of a wanderer in the dimension of narrative, he is a wanderer in the dimension of time. The Time Lords, with their "look but don't touch" ethos and distance from the world, are a fair enough metaphor for the Land of Fiction itself. So the fact that he is something else outside of the Land of Fiction is hardly an issue.

In fact, it's to be expected. After all, we navigate time, internally, through memory and stories, through our minds, which are, of course, far bigger on the inside than the mere lump of grey matter

they appear to be externally. What is a Lord of Time if not the master of all things that have happened, and thus of all metaphors and stories? Except, of course, the Doctor storms out, rejecting his people. Why? Because the Time Lords are far too narrow-minded. They are masters only of the stories that have happened. They cannot interfere and create new stories. And the Doctor is a Lord of all stories, whether real or imagined.

But more important than the fact that this theory can survive almost any canon challenge thrown at it is the fact that it makes sense beyond mere continuity. What defines Doctor Who is the fact that its story never has to end. That any story worth telling can be told as a Doctor Who story, and that there is no upper bound to the number of Doctor Who stories that can be told. Of course the Doctor is the destined and designated Master of the Land of Fiction. Who else possibly could be? What other person in the universe, real or imaginary, could possibly have the job of telling every story that ever was?

And that's the genius of *The Mind Robber*. It comes at one of the series' darkest moments—when its formula seems tired, its very ethics seem to be flagging, and when the entire cultural and ideological foundation for it appears to be crumbling the world over. And right in that moment, we get explicit confirmation of something that previously we had only hoped for and suspected. That Doctor Who is an idea that cannot be brought to an end. That there is always another story. Not just because of the flexibility of the premise or because the series has gone on long enough that it's a cultural institution that is always going to be revisited as long as we have well enough recorded history to remember that it ever existed. No. Because the Doctor is every single story there ever was and ever could be, escaped out into the universe, and running loose bringing them into being.

This is, quite frankly, as powerful an idea as has ever been thought of in fiction. An idea that is far larger than fits in any one person's imagination, even if that imagination is bigger on the inside. Something that, quite apart from anyone's efforts to define it and create it, has taken on a life of its own. A symbol that has real power. A thought that has begun thinking for itself. A dream that no longer needs anyone but itself to dream it.

What if, in 1963, these things did occur? What if we held them to be true?

There are, after all, truths beyond mere canon.

This Pretty Little Thing Here (*The Claws of Axos*)

The Pertwee era was the first really difficult era for me to write about, due largely to the fact that I just never liked it very much. The vision of Doctor Who as an action serial featuring the military just leaves me cold. And much of figuring out how to write about the Pertwee era involved finding an alternative to that.

The Claws of Axos is not the best Pertwee story. It may not even be a very good story, although saying that causes a part of my soul to die. But it's the story where I figured out what I could love about the Pertwee era, which turns out to be an almost completely different thing than what everybody else loves about it. This has led my Pertwee stuff to be among the most divisive stuff I've written, but has equally led to me being able to properly enjoy the Pertwee era, a trade I am totally at peace with.

It's March 13, 1971. Mungo Jerry is at number one still, followed by dueling ex-Beatles as both McCartney and Harrison jostle for chart position. Elsewhere in the charts are Deep Purple and John Lennon and the Plastic Ono Band. But it's week two of the story where it finally happens. T. Rex hits number one with "Hot Love," establishing glam rock as no longer the next big thing but simply as the big thing. We deal with glam in detail in a "Pop Between Realities" essay further in the book, and if you need a primer on it you can just flip ahead. But it's also worth, if you never have, going and looking up some T. Rex appearances on *Top of the Pops* to get a sense of it. Or, alternatively, early David Bowie stuff like "Starman," or things by Slade, The Move, Sweet, or Gary Glitter. What you'll notice immediately is that there's clearly a shared visual aesthetic between glam and Doctor Who.

In real news, Bangladesh splits off from Pakistan, William Calley is found guilty of the Mai Lai massacre, *The Ed Sullivan Show* airs its final in the US, and the fourty-seven-day British postal workers strike ends. There's going to be a lot of strikes over the next few years, so keep your eyes on that.

But let's get back to T. Rex. T. Rex is one of those bands that really consist of a single creative force – Mark Bolan. This was, to be fair, not always true. In the late '60s, under the fuller name of Tyrannosaurus Rex, Bolan and Steve Peregrin Took brought psychedelic folk to what were almost, but not quite, the masses before Bolan sacked the hobbit and created glam rock. The nature of this transition is a watershed moment in popular culture, and gets at a point I made last volume: the crash-and-burn of '60s counterculture that occurred in France and the US simply didn't happen in the UK. Instead, after a bit of fussing about, its psychedelic and countercultural aspects made a coherent and traceable transition into glam.

And as a cursory examination of the visual record shows, there's an intuitive connection between glam rock and Doctor Who. Tat Wood argues for it at length in *About Time*, and it's something we'll explore throughout this volume. All of which is an extremely lengthy way of circling around to the fact that *The Claws of Axos* is the point where Doctor Who finally and unequivocally embraces the Glam Pertwee approach. Indeed, it's arguable that this is the single most glam story in Doctor Who, although unlike the Action Pertwee approach glam doesn't find itself receding until the very tail end of the Pertwee era. Tat Wood refers to this story as the moment when Doctor Who was more glam than glam rock. Which means that it's finally possible to explore in detail how the glam approach to the show works in the first place.

We should start, perhaps, with the writing. This is the debut of Bob Baker and David Martin, who will go on to write eight stories over eight years, with Baker writing one last one on his own in

1979. Along with Robert Holmes they are the defining writers of the 1970s. Unlike Robert Holmes, however, the Bristol Boys, as they were known, are not regular mainstays on people's "best writers of Doctor Who" lists. Admittedly, none of their stories are obvious shoo-ins for classic status save perhaps *The Three Doctors*. But on the other hand, Bob Baker is the writer of several Wallace & Gromit cartoons, including *Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, which means that Bob Baker is the only writer of Doctor Who to have won a film BAFTA or to have written for an Academy Award-winning film. Which is to say that the evidence is reasonably strong that Baker knows what he's doing as a writer, and that Martin presumably does as well.

There's a degree, however, to which one must cling to this assumption like a warm blanket while watching *The Claws of Axos*, because it is very easy to lose faith and conclude that the show has no idea what the heck it's doing here. At first glance the logic in this story seems all over the map. For all of its flaws something like *The Mind of Evil* is broadly defensible on the grounds that it's very well made television. This, on the other hand, seems shockingly amateurish in places. Plot logic is more or less an afterthought. Characters are introduced without meaningful explanation and behave in seemingly insane ways. And the plot is bursting at the seams with an excess of ideas. Many of them are quite cool, but there's a shockingly large number of them, and they just barely hang together as long as you don't do anything like think too hard about them.

But for the most part, the absurdities of the plot are simply extensions of things that Robert Holmes was already doing in both of his Pertwee scripts so far in his development of overtly programmatic characters such as Jo, the Brigadier, and the Master. All of those characters are defined by the absolute and slightly absurd. The Brigadier is so steadfast that he remains resolutely calm even in situations where freaking out is probably the sane thing to do. The Master is a character who develops elaborately villainous schemes regardless of the sensibility of doing so, and often at the expense of actually realizing any of them. Jo is a plucky ditz who remains plucky and slightly naive no matter how horrible a situation she's put into. All of these characters are not just consistent but overly consistent, holding steadfastly to a logic that is just slightly off-kilter for the world of Doctor Who.

The Claws of Axos takes this approach to its inevitable conclusion. In it, nobody behaves in any way like a person in a recognizable or understandable world. Instead, every character is a programmatic high-concept character in the Holmesian mould. This has its plusses and minuses. Its most obvious minus is that all notion of human storytelling goes out the window. There are no people in this story. There are just plot roles interacting. This can be exhausting to watch – this story borders on actively tedious if one attempts to watch it with the assumption that it works anything like *The Mind of Evil*. The tone shift here is as stark as anything from the Hartnell era, but it's easy to miss because both stories share most of their supporting cast and their setting.

But that problem only arises if you try to watch *The Claws of Axos* as though it's the same sort of television that the story before it is. It's true – it's a deeply flawed piece of character drama. But its biggest flaw in this regard is that it's simply not actually a piece of character drama. The question, then, is what it's trying to be instead.

Thankfully, for our purposes at least, the story is not particularly subtle about what it is trying to be. The story works much better if you take it on its own terms, and its own terms are pretty clear. It's very clear that what this story is interested in is throwing as many wild and interesting ideas together as it can possibly fit. This is characteristic of Baker/Martin scripts, which tend to be distilled down and simplified from far more elaborate and over-the-top plots. *The Claws of Axos* originally involved a gigantic skull spaceship landing in Hyde Park and dispensing wishes, for instance. Later, a giant carrot crashes into the Earth.

It's really only in comparison to something like that, however, that *The Claws of Axos* can possibly be considered low key. And unlike skull spaceships in Hyde Park and flaming death carrots, the spectacle that *The Claws of Axos* offers is, at least, actually accomplishable on a BBC budget. Indeed, *The Claws of Axos* in its final form is perfectly suited to the BBC in 1991. More than any story to date, this one takes advantage of the fact that it's made in color. The Axons are a blur of colors not usually associated with aliens. Contrary to Terrance Dicks's maxim that the color of monsters is green, the Axons, in their monstrous form, are an intensely memorable seething mass of orange tentacles. Their spaceship is a garish yellow, which makes for a wonderfully incongruous shot as we see it, on film, in a drizzly English countryside. The inside of it is similarly all yellows and oranges marked by pulsating lights.

What's key about this is not just that the color palate is so lush, but that it's so unnatural: the oranges and yellows are like nothing on Earth, and by extension, like nothing that is familiar to the audience. Although we usually think of the switch to color as a move to greater realism in television, this moves in the opposite direction, using color to present a world that's even more extreme and unusual. Similar touches of overt strangeness abound – the collage of gold-faced Axon heads and evil, tentacled Axons swirling as the Doctor and Jo stagger through a pulsing, strobing Axon spaceship is an amazing visual sequence that is notable in how unlike anything else in Doctor Who before or really since it is. (Indeed, the only point of comparison is the visual effects of glam rock performances on *Top of the Pops*.)

It's clear that this is where the effort in this story went. And lest there be some confusion, note that I'm not suggesting that this is a poorly written story rescued by good special effects. This is a story carefully and deliberately crafted to provide a foundation for alluring, fascinating visuals. The entire point of this story is to swirl previously unimagined sights in front of the audience for twenty-five minutes at a time. It is, in other words, *The Web Planet* for the 1970s.

Except that *The Web Planet* was about showing strange and unimagined things to the audience. The point wasn't that the Zarbi or the Menoptra looked strange. It's that Vortis as a whole was a strange place full of strange creatures. The entire setting and logic of the place is supposed to be alien. That's not true of *The Claws of Axos*. *The Claws of Axos* is still a UNIT story set during the Doctor's exile, and is thus ostensibly meant to be based in our world. In *The Web Planet* the central question is "what is this place," but there's no such mystery to *The Claws of Axos*. The nature of its world, and by extension its logic, is basically familiar. This is where the programmatic characters come in – all of the characters are recognizable in an archetypal sense. We know everything they're going to do. Even the aliens aren't, conceptually, that strange. The basic plot is just the Trojan Horse from Troy's perspective.

Instead, *The Claws of Axos* has a sense of strangeness based on the visual and on the incongruous. Yes, it has swirling and bewildering visuals, but it also creates unusual conceptual spectacles. This is again a factor of the programmatic characters. By boiling the characters down to broad types, the story can begin offering compelling and strange combinations of characters. Usually it accomplishes this by taking two characters that are a reasonably interesting pairing to begin with – the Doctor and the American action hero – and throwing them with a third item that is thoroughly strange – floppy orange Axon monsters. The result is a plot comprised, much like *Terror of the Autons*, out of a series of strange and fascinating set pieces, all surrounded by a bewildering and amazing visual aesthetic.

It's tempting to simply be snooty and suggest that there's some falling off involved in moving from presenting strange things to presenting strange images. That, in other words, the show has

become superficial. But this is where we really turn to glam and to Ballard, both of which provide compelling, intelligent takes on the interplay of images. *The Atrocity Exhibition* was all about the deep power of superficial images. Glam rock, similarly, is in part about taking the opulence of conspicuous consumption and rearranging it into the wrong aesthetic. Its most famous figure is David Bowie during his Ziggy Stardust phase, a phase defined by the character of an alien would-be rock star who gets it ever so slightly wrong. The result has all of the over-the-top excess of the luxury associated with power and authority, except it's all put together pointlessly and haphazardly. It revels in decadence and consumption while denying the systems that ostensibly justify that behavior in society.

And this approach largely describes how *The Claws of Axos* works. On the one level, its central pleasure is a revelry in spectacle and glitz. We are meant to enjoy its images for their own sake. On the other hand, its plot is a straightforward anti-consumerist parable. The Axons are beautiful creatures of gold who offer untold wealth and then drain the world of its resources. And there's a fundamental tension between these two goals. The story is simultaneously reveling in superficial images and warning of their malign influence.

But this isn't a contradiction or a case of sloppy and incoherent execution. This is what concern about the rise of a purely image-based culture of spectacle (which was one of the major concerns of the Situationalist International in France in '68) looked like in 1971. The critique of images was phrased in an image-based, superficial form. *The Claws of Axos* is designed to make the viewer feel uncomfortable about the pleasure they are taking in the object. It's constantly reveling in images that are lurid and unnerving instead of being "fun" as such – ones that are over the top and unlike what things should look like – while simultaneously cautioning us about the very pleasure it is taking.

Which, at long last, brings us around to the Master. One of the standard critiques of Season Eight is that the decision to use the Master in every story robs him of the element of surprise. But this complaint presupposes that the Master is supposed to be a surprise. In future seasons, admittedly, he will be. Once he starts appearing only occasionally the series does settle into a rut of having his revelation as the villain be a surprise. But we shouldn't use the future of the series to judge what it's doing in 1971. Only *The Mind of Evil* actually uses the Master's involvement as a twist revelation any later than the first episode, and even it doesn't make a cliffhanger out of his involvement. And by *The Claws of Axos* it's clear that the audience is supposed to have figured out that the Master is going to be in every story for a while. They take great pains to have everyone be concerned about what the Master might be up to in the first episode well before he actually appears. So his involvement isn't supposed to be a surprise any more than stories taking place on Earth are supposed to be a surprise. That's how the show works now. Consistent setting, consistent antagonist.

Given this, then, Baker and Martin delight in playing with the audience's expectations. Because the Master is supposed to be the villain behind everything – what, post-*Buffy*, we call the Big Bad – Baker and Martin do everything they can to keep him from actually playing that role. So his first appearance here is structured visually as if it's supposed to be a big surprising reveal in classic "Oh look, the story that says it has Daleks in it has Daleks in it" fashion. Except the shot that reveals him also reveals that he's chained up in the Axons' prison. Eventually he manages to sneak out, but then he has to slum it in a team-up with UNIT, spending an episode basically playing the Doctor's role while the Doctor goes and does more important things. He never manages to be in control of this story. It's a little too early in the Master's time on the program to suggest that he's descending into self-parody here, although it's also telling that the idea that the Master is fundamentally inadequate and that his schemes all kind of suck eventually becomes an implicit part of the character. But *The Claws of Axos*

clearly is playing with our expectations of the character and refusing to quite give us what we want – an approach that is a clear cousin of the lurid-not-fun sense of the visual.

This also shows an interesting, new approach to Pertwee. Simply put, they've built a story where his charismatic leading-man confidence is pointless. Since Pertwee is prone to playing the part as a set of tics and catchphrases for the audience to delight in, Baker and Martin write a script that's nothing but tics and catchphrases. Since the story is all artifice and image, Pertwee's performance of the part no longer stands out. Pertwee is just another generator of spectacle in a world that consists of nothing but spectacle. His spectacle happens to be "leading man," just like Jo's is ditz and the Axons' is pulsating orange hues. But in a world where everything is spectacle, "leading man" becomes a flavor, not a role that gives the text a center of gravity.

The result can be read in two ways. In one, it's a continuation of what we saw in *Terror of the Autons*, where this version of the Pertwee years functions by critiquing the Doctor from within his own narrative. Here the critique comes by making an entire world that looks like the Doctor and then taunting the audience for enjoying it. It's effective and it's interesting, and finds a new and challenging take on the era. You couldn't do every story like this, but the point of Doctor Who in the past was to always do something new, so the fact that the idea would be tedious much past four episodes is hardly a fault in a four episode story. And more to the point, the approach provides a crucial breaking point for itself. This story makes it much easier to see Pertwee's Doctor as just another absurd character in the set. That his absurd character is the leading man is not irrelevant, but it's also not something that makes him the center of the show's universe anymore.

But there's another possibility that's even more interesting. The leading man role is, in many ways, the most superficial role available in the story. The traditional leading man is a part defined by the social structures of male privilege and a particularly charismatic figure. It's a role that by its nature demands that everything else cater to it. The leading man is, in other words, fundamentally decadent; he's someone who is the center of attention because of his charm and sex appeal rather than his competence. And it is a part of pure consumption. The leading man exists to be pleasurable for the audience, and he functions by demanding the adoration of the world. He is both the ultimate consumer in his own world and a commodity to be consumed in ours.

But that's not what the role of the Doctor has historically been. Under Hartnell, the Doctor was manifestly not the leading man. Instead he regularly vanished off to the sidelines of stories, and was often removed entirely and put in a coma or otherwise incapacitated. He relied upon being underestimated so that he could then roar up and take control. Troughton introduced leading man charisma to the role, making the Doctor someone we liked and wanted more of – a consumable product. But as we discussed, he used that charisma to constantly take a surprising position within a scene or in the narrative. This is what made him mercurial and fascinating. He was defined by the way he always slipped out of your grasp even as he charismatically drew you in. Troughton took the leading man role, but then never quite gave you the moment of pleasure as you get to watch him vamp around. (Indeed, the only times he vamps in his tenure are at the very beginning in *The Highlanders* when he's taunting the audience with not being William Hartnell, and in *The Dominators* when he finally gets to the point of just giving up on the part.) He made himself into a consumable product, but then never allowed himself to be consumed.

But Pertwee, thus far, is playing the part as a pure leading man in the traditional sense. This fundamentally alters the structure of the show, and not necessarily in good ways. Indeed, it's quite off-putting in parts of this story. The Doctor is basically not nice to anyone at all until the second episode of the story, and spends the entire first episode marching about and rudely shouting at people.

This is something we've never really seen in the Doctor before, not even with Hartnell's grumpy version. There, at least, the character was explicitly unsympathetic and a threat to the show's real stars, Ian and Barbara. Pertwee's Doctor, though, is similarly irritable, but is positioned as the leading man such that every other character must either respect him or eat crow.

But by shifting the entire show in a direction that weakens the leading man's hold on proceedings the leading man stops having that absolute power and starts being a more, well, mercurial character. And the way that this switch works is fundamentally glam. Although Pertwee does not dress in a glam manner as such, his fashion sense provides essentially the same effect we ascribed to glam. He is clearly a luxury-loving aristocrat, but he's the wrong sort of aristocrat. He's part of the establishment, but getting it slightly wrong and turning it into a mockery of it.

Likewise, although he's playing the leading man, the world he's playing it in isn't quite letting him have the part. He's the dashing hero who fixes the problem by fiddling with a control panel somewhere. He may run around and have action scenes and car chases, but at the end of the day he's just going to reverse the polarity of something. The story doesn't need his charisma. It has enough swirling and superficial images to stare at. And when every character operates by an unchanging logic, so that the Brigadier will always be calm, the Master will always be scheming, and Jo will always be plucky, his charisma becomes wholly impotent. A story like *The Claws of Axos* doesn't need a leading man simply because every other character in the story is functionally a leading man in that they have a sort of absolute control over the narrative. And yet there's the Doctor, pointlessly being a leading man even though that's not his job in the story.

But since the Doctor is the clever one who figures out what's going on this becomes self-aware, especially because he's slightly different from the other programmatic characters in the story. The Brigadier, the Master, and Jo are all too good at their roles – capable of maintaining their roles even when circumstances say they should change. The Doctor, on the other hand, is getting his role slightly wrong. In a world where everyone's mask is too big, his is just a bit too small. This makes him the one person who gets to break the rules of the world. And so he plays the glam rock hero in his own era, mocking the job of UNIT's dashing scientific advisor even as he performs it.

The effect, if you will, is a variation of *The Emperor's New Clothes*. Nobody is allowed to say that the emperor is naked. Except here, the emperor knows full well that he's naked. He's enjoying the power of making everyone allow him to strut around naked without being allowed to comment on it. Everybody knows that Pertwee's Doctor is a ridiculous joke. But because he's the leading man they have to take the joke seriously no matter how many ridiculous things he tries to get away with. And thus by seemingly abandoning his mercurial nature for crass consumerism, he gains an even more powerful version of that nature.

It's a very fresh and new take on the character. It's not the only one going on in the Pertwee era; the fundamentally schizoid nature of the era means that other takes still play in. But it's perhaps the defining one – the one that is unique to the era and could only happen in the early '70s while glam rock was blazing its brief trail across the culture. And now, at least, it's firmly established within the series. Seven stories in, Doctor Who has finally found a way to be like no other show on television again.

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea: *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*

Once I realized how I was going to tackle the Pertwee era this entry rapidly became one of the most important ones. Much of my take on the era is based on the idea that its closest cousin in British culture was glam rock - a style embodied by early 70s David Bowie for its gratuitous, over the top, and recklessly camp aesthetic.

Actually, my first instinct was to ask Chris O'Leary, writer of the fabulous blog *Pushing Ahead of the Dame*, for a guest post, but he was too busy, leaving me adrift to handle this myself. I wrote it over Easter weekend, with the house packed with family and guests. I put each song on repeat through headphones and kept listening until I had the section written, then moved on. Which is a wonderful way to use music to motivate yourself to write, and has done away with any desire I ever have to listen to *Ziggy Stardust* again. (Actually, several of the songs are still quite satisfying – "Five Years" is just marvelous.)

It was just about the hardest essay ever to revise for the book version, and so I appended two "extra tracks" charting Bowie's pre and post-70s career and binding it up in a larger mythology of space and science fiction. My copy-editor and I debated extensively how best to treat the titles of fictitious football chants involving Daleks. This is what writing a book is really about.

With thankful apologies to Chris O'Leary of Pushing Ahead of the Dame.

0. "Space Oddity"

Just gonna have to be a different man. - David Bowie, "Changes"

In ancient days, men looked at the stars and saw their heroes in the constellations. In modern times, we do much the same, but our heroes are epic men of flesh and blood. – Undelivered speech in the event that Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were stranded on the moon.

As Chris O'Leary points out in an essay that will be showing up in the next volume, one is spoiled for choice when linking bits of David Bowie to Doctor Who. This is not surprising – the two great British chameleons of their era were always going to look alike. Add to this the fact that Bowie found his first real success with a timely bit of space folk in 1969 and you have an inevitable series of intersections.

When Bowie hit it big again in 1973 it was on a not entirely unrelated trick. "Space Oddity," you see, was about the crushing isolation of space. In this regard it was impressively prescient. Released, in a typical bit of Bowie publicity seeking, days before the Apollo 11 landing, the song impressively foreshadowed the disconnect between the moon landing and the Space-Age future that had been dreamt of throughout the 1960s. The moon wasn't our first step to the stars but our last one – the furthest point we reached before retreating back to Earth. And "Space Oddity," far from being a triumphant bit of space exploration, was a song about the crushing, bleak isolation of space.

But for *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* the approach is turned slightly. Where "Space Oddity" is about the horrific emptiness of the cosmos, the Ziggy Stardust era is about all of the lost dreams of space showing up in the aftermath of their abandonment, in all their glorious, gaudy splendor, looking for a good party and maybe an opportunity to score.

1. "Five Years"

Some say the end is near
Some say we'll see Armageddon soon
I certainly hope we will. – Tool, "Aenema"

The smart money, you have to realize, was not on reaching 1978. The question was just which of the myriad of ways we might kill ourselves would pull it off. Nuclear war? Ecological disaster? Social collapse into anarchy? *Doomwatch*, after all, got three seasons out of cataloging the myriad of ways humanity might slaughter itself through the miracle of science.

So it's no particular surprise that Bowie starts the album with a song of apocalypse. And a remarkably concrete song of apocalypse at that – wandering through the streets and observing the people responding to the news that the Earth has five years to live. But notably absent is any explanation of how this happened – of which disaster will befall us. All of them. None of them. In a world in which the end is an absolute certainty, the means are beside the point.

The result, as Bowie exposes, is the fetishization of disaster. *The Atrocity Exhibition* writ large. The news isn't that we have five years to live. It's that we have only "five years left of crying." The end is a welcome thing. This has always been the logic of Doctor Who – the appeal of looking at the monsters, of seeing the threat. The money shot of *Inferno* is that we finally get to see the world end in fire instead of just being teased. At last, Armageddon stops blue balling us and gives us our payoff. The end of this growing agony and the cathartic release of knowing there is a genuine resolution. Finally, the finale. At its endpoint, Bowie's song explodes from its initial yearning sorrow into a soaring football terrace song. A rousing sing-along chorus of "five years," the end turned into the anthem it always was. "You'll Never Die Alone." "You're going home in a nuclear fireball." "Come on you Daleks."

2. "Soul Love"

The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images. – Guy Debord, Society of the Spectacle

In a world defined by its imminent apocalyptic finale, the blinding flash of the nuclear inferno becomes the light of a film projector, pressing nuclear shadows to the screen for us to stare slack-jawed upon. There is nothing but appearances in a pre-apocalyptic world. Bowie's song begins with a mother kneeling before the grave of a heroic son "who gave his life to save the slogans that hover between the headstone and her eyes, for they penetrate her grieving." War, death, and even bereavement cannot exist without pop.

When the ultimate disaster porn spectacle has become the teleology of the world, there is nothing outside the gaudy glory of slogans. Love is nothing but an ideology, a product, another slogan. There is only idiot love, the love of love. But here again, there is a countermeasure to the bleak cynicism offered by this. The fact that love is empty and cold; a rote formal process. Our contact with each other is nothing but the empty, hollow execution of hormones and rhetoric.

And yet there is some faint remaining value. "Love descends on those defenseless" is a cynical sentiment, but still a variation of the sloganistic "love conquers all." The priest kneeling, experiencing "soul love" in the final verse, still experiences and is involved in some transformation. The singer's loneliness evolves.

The spectacle is not the end of love, but merely its reconfiguration. A love that exists in shallow images, and finds its truth in them, the nuclear shadows burnt into the walls begin, tentatively, to kiss

and fumble at each other's clothing.

3. "Moonage Daydream"
Oh, I'm getting it wrong again, aren't I? I'm always doing that. So many mouths. – Prisoner Zero, The Eleventh Hour

Détournement, the great technique of Guy Debord, provides the crucial through line from the revolutionary ethos of '68 to the savage glory of punk and post-punk. Doctor Who rarely loses contact with this arc of history. Détournement devours the debris of images scattered across the culture and spits them back in a vehement parody, parroting the culture back. As he puts it, "in a world that is really upside down, the true is a moment of the false."

There is a roar of power chords as Bowie's vocal track spits braggadocio. "I'm an ALLIGATOR!" Another power chord. "I'm a Mamapapa comin' for YOOOOU."

The whole song – the whole album in fact – continues in this vein. The clichés of rock delivered wrong, and incoherently, with images that are as alluring as they are wrong. "You're squawking like a pink monkey bird," Bowie intones, straight-faced, as if unaware of his own absurdities. And yet out of this we get the soaring, anthemic chorus.

Watching the Ziggy Stardust concert documentary, the most interesting moment that D.A. Pennebaker manages is when he turns the camera on a single fan during this song. In religious ecstasy, she sways and dances, cradling her head in her own hands, pressing her space face close to the music, freaking out in glorious rapture.

This is the central power of Ziggy, of Bowie, of glam, and, yes, of Doctor Who – that in amidst the mad collage of spectacles it is possible to build a genuine moment of drama. This is love in the age of apocalypse. But what is crucial is that it is genuine. We do not need to take this on faith. We do not need to qualify. Stare into the electric eye of this moonage girl and the truth is clear.

4. "Starman"
Unknown gods who visited the primeval Earth in manned spaceships – Erich von Däniken, Chariots of the Gods?

The week after *The Time Monster* takes its final bow, David Bowie charts with *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. In many ways glam's high-water act, this album kicks off a phase in which David Bowie effectively has five albums out within a year. Between "Space Oddity" and this he was largely anonymous, even though he was making quite good albums. Then he suddenly hit it big. In a twelve-month period his three prior albums, Ziggy, and his follow-up album *Aladdin Sane* all chart. But it's Ziggy that is the spark – the album that suddenly explodes David Bowie out into the world.

More specifically, the spark is "Starman," the lead single, which first crept into the charts with the last episode of *The Time Monster*. More than any other song on the album, this is the one that nods at David Bowie's past. The thing about Ziggy is that, on paper, it is in no way Bowie's best album of the early '70s. That would be *Hunky Dory*, the album that has "Changes," "Oh! You Pretty Things," "Life on Mars?," and "Kooks" on it. But *Hunky Dory* initially died on the charts. Its only hit single, "Life on Mars?," charted in the wake of Ziggy Stardust.

It wasn't until Bowie returned to the themes of his until then one-hit wonder, "Space Oddity," that he took off. But as we've seen, "Starman" is no sequel. Rather, it's a complete inversion. The

moment of Doctor Who that tracks most straightforwardly to "Space Oddity" is *The Ambassadors of Death*, with its bleak and scary portrayal of space and the Doctor sitting in his tin can. This is something else: a Starman, waiting in the sky, fearful that his splendor will blow our minds.

This is one of the songs where the supposed concept of the album actually distinctly makes sense. An alien love messiah cum rock star, striding from the sky to offer us salvation, an alternative to the eschatological spectacle surrounding us. Youth culture's rebellion gets stashed in plain sight, the children losing it, using it, boogying their way to a newfound nirvana, a secret midnight rebellion providing the sparkling landing lights for our freaky Space Age savior.

If it is not too obvious a point to make, this is where Doctor Who and Ziggy come closest to intersection, with Pertwee cast as the transcendent Starman, the great cosmic protector of Earth, the coolest damn thing ever to wear a velvet jacket.

It is worth looking up Bowie's *Top of the Pops* performance of this song – the performance that really broke him out. Watch as at first the camera creeps around him, treating the singer not as a beloved pop star but as an object of fear to be crept around – a Doctor Who monster. And then a minute in, Bowie's phenomenal guitarist, Mick Ronson, is suddenly wrapped up in a hug from Bowie, pulled towards the microphone, alien sex god and rock star arm in arm, the cosmos itself giving us leave to boogie.

5. "It Ain't Easy"

Is the enlightened man subject to the law of causation? – Question in a thirteenth-century Zen koan.

In the aforementioned concert movie, perhaps the strangest inclusion on Bowie's part is "Wild Eyed Boy from Freecloud," the overtly Buddhist B-side to "Space Oddity." This song is, in many ways, its counterpart on the album. Its inclusion is utterly given that in hindsight the better-known options like "Velvet Goldmine" thrashed about on the cutting room floor.

"Wild Eyed Boy from Freecloud" is a parable of a boy on the margins of his own village, a haunting piece that describes the marginalized prophet being put to death by his village and watching in horror as the Himalayan mountain takes the revenge he never sought on his behalf. The imagery of the mountain is present in "It Ain't Easy" as well, starting with a young man looking out upon the world and seeing the places he could be. But then he returns to the world, the strange materialism of the town and the hoochie coochie women. Enlightenment runs aground in the world. The singer of this song does not have the enlightenment of the wild-eyed boy, but instead claws desperately for it as it slips endlessly away from him.

Or at least that's perhaps the point. The song is a weak spot all the same, a puzzling side-ender that mostly seems to encourage flipping the record over early. The "concept album" status of Ziggy Stardust – of all of Bowie's four great "character" records, actually – is easily overstated, and the easiest explanation for this song may well just be that it's a piece of crappy filler. But the idea of crappy filler parallels Doctor Who at least as well as Buddhist parables and Starmen do. A well-meaning misstep, a piece that, not for lack of trying, never quite makes sense and never quite works. The only question is which of the many options within the Pertwee era we take as the analogue to this song.

6. "Lady Stardust"

Yates's fingers shifted position over his mouth, just this side of a threat to clamp down if he said

another word. Benton swallowed and stayed still. He felt himself getting hard against his better judgment. – "Keeping Secrets" by platoapproved, from A Teaspoon and an Open Mind

The faint, tentative cabaret piano that introduces Ziggy's second side moves us to a strange new place. For the first time in the album, we are invited to view the alien externally. A sad beauty, mocked and laughed at even as he pours beautiful music out, singing "songs of darkness and dismay." Lady Stardust, in this song, is Marc Bolan, lead singer of T. Rex, yes. But perhaps the more interesting fact is that Lady Stardust is a male in the first place, referred to with the male pronoun throughout the song. The obvious analogy is the drag queen.

The main thing to recognize about drag queens is that there is next to no relationship between that concept and the concept of transgender people. Drag queens are men dressing as women – playing at femininity. They are not people gendered as male at birth who are in fact women. They are people who identify as men but enjoy playing the role of a woman. And crucially, the drag queen gets it slightly wrong, playing the part with too much gaudy excess. This is why there is the modern concept of the female drag queen. Drag sits on the line between idolatry and parody, between the sentimental embrace of camp and the cynical mockery of détournement.

Put another way, drag is weaponized camp – a loving attack. Drag is marginalized by design. It transgresses, but is willfully blind to its own failure to "pass" such that its transgression is always obvious. But through its blindness, it manages an eagerness, an honesty, a, dare I say it, authenticity. Just as the girl rapturously presses her space face close to Ziggy's, drag is another moonage daydream, a collage taken seriously. Drag, like glam, is a secret handshake, a shibboleth to the world of the outsider. "He's faking it, so he must be one of us fakers." The closet becomes as much a source of pride as of shame.

(The original drag queen, of course, is Beau Brummel. The dandy is drag to begin with, doubly so when embraced as a slight misunderstanding of the decadent cool of the James Bond-era action hero. This is why Doctor Who became an iconic show within gay culture – because for five years in the '70s, its leading man was a drag action hero.)

7. "Star"

I cross the void beyond the mind, the empty space that circles time. – Jon Pertwee, "Who Is the Doctor?"

In all of this, there is an unasked question. If the purpose of the exercise is to build a new form of love and meaning out of the discarded scraps of apocalyptic spectacle, can the figure of the rock star ever manage this? There is much to doubt here. The basic idea of a revolutionary cult of personality jars.

But more broadly, much of the underlying theory of this performance is overtly Marxist. This *Ziggy Pertwee and the Spiders from Metabelis Three* concept works for the era, and I maintain that it is by far the interpretation that throws up the most fascinating wonders, but we have to accept the Doctor as an actively Marxist figure. Which is fine – the era came straight out of psychedelic revolution, and one of the architects of the Pertwee era was Malcolm Hulke. Doctor Who is always allied, on one level, with Marxism.

But here we run into a problem. The rock and roll star is a capitalist phenomenon – a creature of consumption. Here Bowie sings of a longing to be a rock star, but what he really wants are the trappings: the money, the fame, the glory. Once those are obtained, perhaps, he can sleep at night and

fall in love. The song begins with friends trying to change the world – fight in Belfast, or go on hunger strikes. But Bowie wants to be a rock star.

This is not a superficial refusal to join the fight. Rather, it is the realization that the revolutionary figure, the great celebrity who can change the world, is still an invention of the very system being fought. In his introduction to *The Society of the Spectacle*, Martin Jenkins describes celebrity as a capitalist lottery, a system by which just enough people are given the spectacular rewards of capitalism, and because it could be anyone, we all play along.

This is the sad truth underneath the song. The one thing that Bowie cannot do as a rock star is attack the system that creates the rock and roll star. The one freedom the Starman cannot grant us is the freedom not to have to look to the stars.

8. "Hang On to Yourself"

They're great favourites with the children, you know, with their gnashing and snapping and tearing at each other. – Vorg, Carnival of Monsters

The companion piece, in most regards, to "It Ain't Easy," "Hang On to Yourself" is an overdone pastiche of rock, a whirlwind tour of snippets from other rock stars. It's the sting in the trap, if you will . . . the song where the stitched together fakery of Ziggy Stardust stands revealed as the cheap fraud it is. The first verse sings of a cheap groupie "praying to the light machine," and seems like nothing so much as a slap in the face to the space faced girl dancing to "Moonage Daydream," a mockery of her for being thick enough to embrace something as stupid and plastic as the crazy space freak.

And the worst part is, the song knows full well that it's full of it. "You're the blessed," Bowie sings, "we're the Spiders from Mars." The song has the gall to dispense rock star ministry even as it laughs at the congregation. The singer has no such illusions, does not for a moment pretend this is anything other than a cheap act; "If you think we're gonna make it, you better hang on to yourself." Not only can't the Starman provide any relief from celebrity, he doesn't even want to.

9. "Ziggy Stardust"

This was exactly you. All this, all of it. – River Song, A Good Man Goes to War

What does a rock song written in the aftermath of the end of rock and roll sound like? Moments after admitting to the savage vacancy of the part, Bowie unleashes one of the great guitar riffs in rock history. The result is a riff that mourns its own passing, fitting for the song that introduces us to Ziggy himself by killing him. Consumed by his own fans, torn to pieces, eaten alive by the very spectacle he feeds upon, Ziggy nevertheless is here safely enmeshed in a knowingly iconic song, a glorious creature of guitar riffs and earworms.

Even after his critique of the rock star, in other words, Bowie is acknowledging its allure. The rock star is in many ways the ultimate alien – always in a fundamental sense distant from the fans whose lives he supposedly chronicles and speaks the truth of. The bliss, which the young girl sways to during "Moonage Daydream," exists not because of the accuracy of the description but precisely because of its source – the girl can only truly be understood by an alien who can never be a part of her world.

Ziggy and Pertwee are effectively indistinguishable. Space messiahs in drag, they stand astride the world with growing awareness of the fact that the salvation they offer requires their own death to

realize. This song is that growing realization – the sense that even now as we understand the Pertwee era, as we reach his finest hour (and Season Ten is, without question, his finest hour) – that there is something unsustainable here. That the whole thing will, in time, come crashing down.

This song, then, is its tombstone. Here, suspended in that moment, shuddering in the post-coital bliss of Mick Ronson's reverb, we mourn the end with the very excess that brought it around. How glum. How glam.

10. "Suffragette City"

A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle. – Irina Dunn

Oh, all right, let's talk about Jo Grant – the one thing in Doctor Who more glam than Pertwee's Doctor, more glam than Axos, more glam, perhaps, than glam rock itself. The thing about Jo Grant is that in the course of trying to create a dumb broad who exists only to get captured, Terrance Dicks inadvertently created one of the great feminist icons of Doctor Who.

The decadent virility of the rock star is necessarily uncomfortable with the feminine. Bowie can wear its trappings, make it fall in love with him, use it, and abuse it. And yet still this song exists, telling of a harsh city of women who can use him better than he can use them. Wham bam thank you ma'am indeed, "Suffragette City" is the remainder of Ziggy's fall, and, at that, what killed him.

But this is no panicked ball of castration anxiety cursing the vagina dentata. This is an anthem of self-consumption, a man happy to have his spine put out of place by this girl who's total blam-blam. The final form of the elusive lunar goddess in the audience for "Moonage Daydream," we see the power she had at last, the capacity to draw pleasure from the rubble of the spectacle. Even as Ziggy consumes himself for her, she readies her raygun for the next head.

Loved too much to ever be hurt, knowing she can get away with anything, well aware of our gaze, Jo smiles and goes about her business. The Doctor grasps her hand, stares adoringly at his companion, and they run off from whatever monster is chasing them this week, she having the time of her life, he deludedly thinking he's actually in charge here and that he exists for something other than her pleasure.

(Still, there is something irksome here. An object that deforms the narrative is not the same as a subject.)

11. "Rock and Roll Suicide"

Don't cry. Where there's life, there's . . . – The Third Doctor, Planet of the Spiders

A mournful eulogy to the burnt out rockstar that gives way to his own garish resurrection, his cheapest spectacle proving to be his apotheosis. Torn apart by the very absurdity of a revolutionary rock star, killed by the basic impossibility of being a messianic commodity, Ziggy somehow lives on.

This is no surprise. Created to counter eschatology, to turn the fetishized spectacle of death into a mad celebration, this comeback is not his final move but his first. Of course death is no particular obstacle or stress for Ziggy. How could it be? Built out of the wasted salvage of death to begin with, Ziggy can make himself out of his own death as easily as anyone else's. Consume and burn out a rock star and another will take its place. The role survives its actor, and exists independently from him.

The ironic thing, of course, is that Bowie went on to literalize this final move, nearly flaming out in a staggering feat of recreational pharmacology, reduced to a pathetic shell of a man. This was always a possibility, and Ziggy Stardust is as much a reflection of Bowie's own fears about his

family's history of mental illness and how it might impact him as it is a prediction or a diagnosis. But as if to prove his final point, Bowie's own course was to burn out and then move on, to come back, reinventing himself again, and again, and again, as immortal as Ziggy's doppelgänger.

∞. Ashes to Ashes

Time might change me
But I can't trace time – David Bowie, "Changes"

Put another way, the ending of the story is inscribed in the beginning. This is the curious condition of the 1970s. Suspended as they are between the youth counterculture of the 1960s and the conservative monolith of the 1980s, they seem to exist mostly to transform one into the other. They are not, crucially, the hand-off between two visions. Rather they are the crucible in which one turned to the other.

But this is a foolish view of both ends of the 1970s. It is not as though the 1960s did not have a powerful reactionary movement. Indeed, that reactionary movement ultimately won. Similarly, it is not as though the 1980s lacked a vibrant counterculture. The counterculture never did so well as when it had Thatcher to fight against. The 1970s are not some transition between two states. They're the cyclic period as we circle back around to the same status quo.

The ecstatic highs of Bowie's Starman star turn are bounded on either side by his Major Tom songs, the first chronicling the emptiness of space, the second revealing Major Tom to be a burnt-out junkie. The highs of raw ecstasy and the lows of oblivion become, in the course of this cycle, indistinguishable. This is the real truth of the 1970s: nothing changed in the least.

Sheer Poetry (*The Brain of Morbius*)

Beloved and classic stories always present a bit of a challenge - a sense of having to rise to the occasion. Sometimes, however, they all but write themselves. *The Brain of Morbius* is such a wonderfully dense story that the challenge wasn't so much figuring out what to say as it is conducting and organizing the route through the story. Thankfully some of my earlier work within the Hinchcliffe era paid off here - I already had established that contrasting narrative logics were a major part of the era.

What that let me do here was set up the four narrative logics individually, and then start to weave them together to form the whole. This felt satisfying, since it's basically the structure of most of the good Hinchcliffe stories: crash a couple contrasting ideas together, and then start reconciling them and deciding what trumps what. It's a neat sort of summary - you end up just describing most of the story, but less as a plot summary and more conceptually, which makes it interesting to read whether you've seen the story or not. At least, in theory.

Many of the best alternate interpretations of Doctor Who episodes come when you have one line that you just pull on like a piece of string until the entire structure unravels. The fact that *The Brain of Morbius* has a line about alchemy made it all too easy. Alchemy is a recurring theme in the blog, due to a combination of its interest in mysticism and the fact that it was a favorite theme of David Whitaker, one of the best and most influential figures in Doctor Who's history. So once I had that line to build out from getting the rest of the interpretation was easy. The result is probably the post I refer back to most often in the blog.

Somewhat later, in a post not included in this book, I came up with a different interpretation of the Morbius Doctors based on the fact that Graeme Harper and Robert Holmes are among the faces used and the fact that Harper directed and Holmes wrote *The Caves of Androzani*, in which the Fifth Doctor, who would be renumbered the Thirteenth if the Morbius Doctors were counted, regenerates. It is possibly the silliest fan theory I have ever come up with, and I am far prouder of it than I should be.

It's January 3, 1976. Despite the fact that we have jumped three weeks into the future, Queen remain undisturbed at #1. It doesn't move from number one during the next four weeks. Also charting are David Bowie, ABBA, Michael Oldfield, Barry White, and Greg Lake, the latter with "I Believe in Father Christmas," which I would like to point out is easily one of the five best Christmas songs written by popular musicians in the latter half of the 20th century. Seriously not a bad four weeks for music there.

During the few weeks in which Philip Hinchcliffe's bold new idea of a midseason break for Doctor Who (also known as Christmas) have played out, Carlos the Jackal and others kidnapped delegates at an OPEC meeting in Vienna, and a bomb at LaGuardia Airport in New York kills eleven and does not lead to a decade of pointless war for the United States. While during this story's transmission, the trial of members of the Red Army Faction begins in Germany, the first commercial Concorde flight takes off, and the Scottish Labour Party is formed.

While on television, we get a classic. I mean, a bona fide, proper one - another one of the stories that people rave about as one of the best Doctor Who stories. (The Hinchcliffe era has a lot of these, as we've said.) But here, I've got to admit, I was definitely under the spell. I had the irritating cutdown hourlong version of this that came out on VHS, and on the one hand could tell it was great,

but on the other could tell that something was missing. And I remember being absolutely thrilled when the full version came out, and devouring it. I must have watched this one a good half dozen times over the course of two years between the two edits. (This would have been... ooh, 1993-94.) So this is another one, like *Genesis of the Daleks* and *The Ark in Space*, that's a tentpole of both Doctor Who and my childhood.

In many ways, this story is the high point of what we might think of as the Hinchcliffe era's first act. Everything we've praised in the era so far comes together in a story with as much density and power as *Genesis of the Daleks*, only better written and not reliant on nostalgia for its evocative power. It is another story that raises the bar for what the show is capable of; It's utterly and completely fantastic. So let's just talk about why. And then maybe towards the end we'll try something ambitious like declaring what the entire point of Doctor Who is.

First of all, there is the writing. This story benefits from extraordinary fortune in the scriptwriting stage. Terrance Dicks pitched a script based on the idea of doing a reverse *Frankenstein* story in which the scientist was a hideous monster who creates a perfectly normal-looking human. Then, after delivering the scripts, he went on vacation. Looking at them, Robert Holmes observed the same problem with this any script editor worth his salt (Dicks, no doubt, included) would have noticed: a story in which the impressive monster appears at the start and the big reveal is an ordinary person has some serious structure problems. And unlike *The Android Invasion*, he stepped in an fixed the problems this time, doing a massive rewrite on the script that flipped it back to a more traditional Frankenstein setup. The result is a script that has the structural zip of a Terrance Dicks script and the delightful characterization of a Robert Holmes script.

Then there is the acting, in which three things stand out. Baker, as always, is marvelous. Over the past chunk of stories he's been increasingly developing ways to simultaneously show that the Doctor is genuinely scared by the things he's fighting and to show the Doctor's steadfast refusal to take the villains seriously. Here he has something of a breakthrough, figuring out how to play the Doctor as someone who clearly genuinely believes these villains might kill him, but who is more annoyed at the prospect of losing to them than he is scared of it.

Sladen, on the other hand, finds new highs for her character. The scene in which she engages in hysteria-laden banter with the Doctor after she is blinded is absolutely jaw-dropping, providing a better depiction of someone's terror at hostile circumstances than anything seen in a "serious" drama like *Survivors*. In particular great is the way in which she manages to simultaneously convey anger at the Doctor for dragging her into this situation and awareness that she's always known that this sort of thing could happen. It is, simply put, one of the greatest acting performances the series has ever seen, not just up to this point but ever.

And then there is Philip Madoc as the main villain of the piece. This is just a sensible thing to do. In general, the answer to "should I hire Philip Madoc" is "Yes." In this case, he does a phenomenal job of turning a generic mad scientist into an interesting character, managing to nail the megalomaniacal speechmaking ("You chicken-brained biological disaster!") while still giving the character a wealth of subtle inflections and turns of phrase that keep him unpredictable and charming. He manages to swing gamely from raving lunacy to genuine menace, and is utterly compelling the whole time. The scene in which he apologizes to the eponymous brain of Morbius for making a bad pun is, in particular a highlight of the season.

All of this, of course, is just surface matter - another case of Hinchcliffe starting from the raised baseline of quality he inherited from Barry Letts and successfully pushing one or two elements to the point of being fantastic while maintaining Letts's skill at avoiding major screw-ups. All we've noted

so far is no more than what we got in *Pyramids of Mars* - a story whose bid for classic status amounts to doing nothing terribly wrong and several things very right. *The Brain of Morbius*, however, is miles ahead of *Pyramids of Mars*. *The Brain of Morbius* is much closer to what we'd have gotten if everything in *Planet of Evil* had actually worked right.

Back in the *Pyramids of Mars* essay I talked about how that story opened a door that would be taken advantage of later. It's later. *Pyramids of Mars* came up with the idea of injecting the Doctor into an existing story. The next obvious step is to merge this with the genre collisions experimented with in *Terror of the Zygons* and *Planet of Evil* - that is, inject him into an existing story that's already framed as a genre collision of its own. And here we accomplish that with no fewer than four distinct and coherent narrative logics in play.

Anchoring it, of course, is *Frankenstein* - the fixed and known story that the Doctor must find a place in. *The Brain of Morbius* is a straight homage to that story, and, as ever, to the Hammer adaptations of it. Already there is a marked difference with *Pyramids of Mars*. The mummy stories that *Pyramids of Mars* retold were simply standard issue horror movies deep into their respective franchises. *Frankenstein*, on the other hand, is both a classic of British literature and arguably the first real work of science fiction. This is territory with a deep and mythic resonance for Doctor Who, in other words. Miles and Wood suggest that this story has the tone of Lord Byron showing up and checking on how everyone has been doing since he died, and that's not entirely inaccurate, even if it does reiterate an unfortunate sexism of Byron's era given who it was that actually came up with *Frankenstein*.

The effect of this is to turn up the volume on the inevitability that comes from juxtaposing the Doctor with an existing story. Putting the Doctor in a mummy story is an exercise in contrast. But in a real, albeit mildly ineffable sense, *The Brain of Morbius* puts the Doctor in a situation he is oddly suited to. This may be a story that is fundamentally about magic, but it's rooted in one of the earliest modern explorations of the implications of technology. *Frankenstein* is, in many ways, the original "blur the lines of science fiction and fantasy" story - a science fiction story written as a ghost story. As such it really is perfect for the Doctor. This means that the danger of the story is enhanced, especially because of a deft sense of what to use as cliffhangers. The story's three cliffhangers are, in order, Sarah Jane being menaced by Morbius's body, Sarah Jane being menaced by Morbius's brain, and Sarah Jane being menaced by Morbius in toto. By opening with Morbius's body, there becomes a Chekovian tension to the whole thing - a continual knowledge that there is nothing the Doctor can possibly do to prevent Morbius's return as such. And this is fitting. This is a story that the Doctor actually fits into perfectly - one that actually makes a credible case for being able to impose its narrative logic on him, instead of, as we are used to, the other way around.

Let's move on to the second narrative logic - the beautiful cynicism of Robert Holmes. It has been some time since we have really seen this Robert Holmes. The irony of his tenure as script editor is that the bulk of the scripts he wrote while in charge were the ones that are the least like what he is most remembered as being. But here we are given the delightful spectacle of a struggle to stop the most feared war criminal in all of history from rising from the dead in which the main characters other than the regulars are: 1) An old woman who is literally dying of dullness. (For the record, you will never convince me that the Sisterhood's tendency to, at seemingly random moments, begin hissing "Sacred fire! Sacred flame!" is not intended to be as hilarious as it is.) 2) A mad scientist who seems continually uncertain whether he cares more about raising his war criminal master or just doing terrible things with bodies. (Let's face it, the only reason the line "To know death, Condo, you must fuck life in the gallbladder!" does not appear is because it was BBC1 at teatime, not because it

wouldn't have fit. If you have no idea why this parenthetical comment exists, go track down the film *Flesh for Frankenstein*. We'll be right here.) 3) His idiot assistant who is mostly obsessed with pretty girls and getting his hand back. 4) His war criminal master's disembodied brain, which is suicidal and envies vegetables. And which gets dropped on the floor.

It is classic Robert Holmes - a set of characters, none of whom are on their own merits even remotely a problem for the Doctor, but who happen to be set up just right to pose a massive threat. And against this bunch of ludicrous characters is our hero, a madman with a box who is simultaneously capable of making the audience believe that this is a terrible threat to the entire universe and making them aware that he thinks he is surrounded by idiots. This is one of Holmes's biggest skills as a writer - he is extremely good at making a world that feels authentically absurd. It's a strange sort of realism - managing to be as screwed up as reality. But it's also by far the most compelling sort of realism. Far too often being "realistic" means shaving off the odd and the fanciful, an account of reality that is irreconcilable with actual human experience, which is, let's face it, absolutely mental.

On to the third narrative logic. In which we're going to have to return to an aspect of production design again. Because *The Brain of Morbius* is a masterpiece of how to do design and effects work on a BBC budget. The decision here is clearly to make a couple of things - Solon's castle, the inner sanctum of the Sisterhood, and the Morbius outfit - look very good. The rest of the story looks like cheap BBC studio sets. And why not? *I, Clavdivs* looked like cheap BBC studio sets. Cheap BBC studio sets are a valid genre trope unto themselves. This story is a textbook example of taking your bubble wrap seriously, and it does so with beautiful bravado. It is unapologetically an epic science fiction story done as a BBC television play on a Saturday at teatime. It makes no apologies for this, and just gets on with it.

There's a fire to this. When I talked about *Terror of the Zygons* it was possible, if I'd wanted, to suggest that we were in "so bad it's good" territory. And there it was a risk. But here there's something else going on. There is no shortage of science fiction series have fallen down badly attempting to get low budgets to stretch to epic stories. But that's not quite the sort of science fiction series that Doctor Who is, and this is the story where we can really see that clearly. The story isn't "so bad it's good." Rather, it's at peace with the fact that it is going to continually juxtapose the ridiculous and the sublime. We can see here how these narrative logics start to piece together, in fact. The dodgy low-rent universe of Robert Holmes, in which epic threats to the universe are suicidal vegetable enviers, is one that lends itself to the slightly low-grade approach of the cheap BBC studio. At its core, what Doctor Who is doing here is not the cult aesthetic of "so bad it's good," but rather the forming of a new aesthetic that merges the epic grandeur of *Space: 1999* with the affordable maturity of *I, Clavdivs*. This is the story to point to in refutation to every claim that doing sci-fi epics on a BBC budget is embarrassing or a bad idea. And the answer is this: Doctor Who doesn't do epic sci-fi on a BBC budget. It does BBC television theater on an epic sci-fi scale. And it's bloody brilliant, both as an idea and in execution.

Finally, then, we come around to the fourth narrative logic. Much is made (and I look forward to making even more) of Robert Holmes's dramatic reinvention of the Time Lords in *The Deadly Assassin*. And while *The Deadly Assassin* is indeed radical, it is far too easy to overstate the degree to which it in particular marks a reinvention of the Time Lords. Quite frankly, a lot of the reinvention happens here, in this story. It is easy to understate the significance of finding out, for instance, that there exists a matriarchal sect of immortal psychics who the Time Lords consider equals and have a peace treaty with. And, for that matter, it is easy to understate the significance of finding out that

somebody like Morbius exists.

Miles and Wood observe that a large number of the Hinchcliffe stories deal with the return of a thought-dead enemy. This is the third big example of this. The first was *Revenge of the Cybermen*, in which the dead threat was one drawn from the show's own history and legend. The second was *Pyramids of Mars*, in which the dead thing is a powerful being from another story who thus offers a real threat to the Doctor's story. Now we have a third variation. Morbius is a threat from within the series - the most feared renegade Time Lord ever. He is presented, in other words, as a dark and twisted template for the Doctor.

The most obvious thing to compare this to is the Master. But the Master was always neutered by being a recurring villain. Closer, perhaps, is Omega, ut Omega was presented to us as legend - as something out of stories. Morbius is stranger; he's presented to us as the ancient history of the Time Lords. We have never really been asked to think of the Time Lords as having history, as opposed to merely having legend. Previously our image of them has been as the sentinels of history. Now they seem subject to that which they previously ruled over. Or, rather, to that which they previously guarded. (It is perhaps here worth thinking of nothing so much as the oddly powerful impotence of the House of Lords. But more on that in *The Deadly Assassin*, I should think.) This is the fate that the Doctor brought down upon the Daleks, and now we see that it has, in turn, been brought down upon the Time Lords.

But even as the Time Lords are bound into history and regional politics here, they are also given a new sort of power. For it is also easy to make far too little of the moment in which the Doctor suggests that the Sisterhood of Karn's use of psychic powers to transport matter is a sort of primitive system that the Time Lords have outgrown - a moment that seems to set what the Time Lords do not as advanced science (as it at least pretended to be in *The Three Doctors*) but as advanced magic. This may seem a small change, especially given that this blog has been tracking occult and magical elements of Doctor Who since day one. But it's usually been a persistent subtext. Here it begins to break decisively into the realm of the explicit.

So even as the Time Lords become subject to history, they acquire a magical power. But we also see this magical power condemned. The Doctor eviscerates the Sisters of Karn for being unchanging, and thus for never progressing. He implies that in some fundamental sense this is why their precious Elixir of Life is drying up - that they do not progress. And we are told that death is the price of progress, death being a concept that has always been associated with the Doctor, both in positive magical connotations and in the terrible ruin he leaves in his wake.

So those are the four narrative logics: Frankenstein, Holmes's cynicism, the theatrical tradition of the BBC, and this mythic rewriting of the Time Lords. This does not set some kind of record for the number of narrative logics going on in a story simultaneously. But past stories that have juxtaposed a laundry list like this have done it through rapid shifts - changing tones constantly, whether deliberately or through sheer incompetence. Here, however, all four narrative logics braided tightly to one another, and the result is stunning.

In short, there is a line of history that leads to this episode. Starting from *Frankenstein* in 1818 and the gothic romanticism that gave birth to science fiction, stretching forward through the Victorian science magic that Doctor Who descends from, and continuing right into the thinking that created the BBC and the idea of television theater, and, not too long after, Doctor Who. A real and meaty strand of history that is carefully built up through this story. All of the component parts are explicitly laid out, and they're laid out in a way that is at once epic and firmly grounded in a sense of reality - of the mundane viscera of history. The story shows all of this. It goes out of its way to point it out, and to

stress the importance of social progress - of moving forward.

And through all of this, we know, because of the fact that it is rooted in *Frankenstein*, a story that is conspicuously well known, that Morbius is going to return. The one thing that is guaranteed - that not even the Doctor can possibly stop - is that this terrible threat from ancient history that the Doctor is terrified of, and rightly so because he is at once the once the original renegade Time Lord, and thus the template for all that the Doctor is, and the most monstrous criminal in history will rise again. In the end, the Doctor is going to have to face Morbius and defeat him.

The Doctor even knows this. Watch how he leaves Solon, who is obsessed with raising Morbius, unattended with the instruction to kill Morbius. This is either the single most stupid thing that Dicks and Holmes have ever had the Doctor do, or it is the moment where the Doctor accepts that he will have to face Morbius. Certainly when the Doctor does face him, the Doctor seems ready for him, already having figured out how he will fight him. The Doctor is in full on Troughton mode here, goading and manipulating Morbius, bullying and hectoring him into a trap the Doctor has already figured out.

And then they lock minds, and the story makes a staggering retcon. It is, of course, a retcon that has, by general consensus, been retconned out itself. Morbius regresses the Doctor through his previous incarnations. We see Pertwee, Troughton, and Hartnell. And then Morbius shouts about sending the Doctor back to his very beginning, and we get a cascade of other faces. Modern convention is that these faces are Morbius's past incarnations, but that's clearly not the episode's intent. The episode has Morbius shouting about taking the Doctor "back to the very beginning" as these faces appear, establishing clearly that they are meant to be pre-Hartnell versions of the Doctor.

In other words, *Frankenstein*, positioned as the story from which all of Doctor Who has flowed, gets into a fight with Doctor Who and successfully deals a mortal wound to it. In its own way, this is a version of Moffat's oldest question in the universe being "Doctor Who?" Morbius breaches the boundary of the Doctor's story; he breaks free from Doctor Who. And in a truly staggering comment on the nature of history and narrative, he does it by breaking out the back door - by pushing past the beginning of the story into the unknowable fathoms beneath it. (The faces, incidentally, are various production crew. One is Graham Harper, then a production assistant, who would go on to direct two stories in the 80s, and then be brought back again by Russell T. Davies to direct multiple stories from Seasons Two through Four of the new series. In other words, this moment rivals Peter Davison's daughter who played the Tenth Doctor's daughter having a daughter with David Tennant, who grew up with Peter Davison as his Doctor as the single most inadvertently meta moment in Doctor Who history.)

The result seems to kill both. This makes sense for the Doctor, especially given that his own story has been attacked and punctured. But Morbius? Clearly it is essentially fatal for him. He breaks Doctor Who's continuity, there is an explosion around his head, and smoke pours out. He runs away, screaming madly, and is finally driven off a cliff by the Sisterhood of Karn. This is a wonderfully bold statement. Doctor Who and *Frankenstein*, when they face each other down and try to destroy each other's fundamental narrative structures, fight to a draw of mutually assured destruction.

Only they don't. The Doctor faces Frankenstein, dies, and then... sneaks away. He survives. He has one more trick up his sleeve. The Elixir of Life. And here we come to the one last detail that makes everything fit together. The Elixir of Life. Which for once I don't even have to stretch for. I mean, it's obvious what's going on there. A bunch of chemical reactions that create an elixir that grants immortality. Or, as the Doctor describes it, "The impossible dream of a thousand alchemists dripping like tea from an urn."

We now come to the moment where I make a definitive statement of what it is that this series argues - in which I finally lay my cards down and make my thesis statement. In which I stick my neck out and say "This is, in the end, what Doctor Who is about." (And good, it's only been four books, right?)

We have already been told, after all, that the flame is drying up because of a lack of progress and change. Which means that the goal of alchemy - a concept that we have discussed before and found at the very roots of the show - can only be achieved via the progression of history, which we have been taught by the show to consider as a social phenomenon? We are told that the actual chemical synthesis is easy - that getting the Elixir under a spectrograph would be sufficient to crack its secrets. That's, it seems, the easy part. The tricky business is this stuff about death and progress. The show has never actually said this before. It feels in every sense like the culmination of everything that the show has been doing for twelve years now. Of course this is the real answer to alchemy. What else could it be?

And this is not just trotted out as a moral. This is distilled out of ninety minutes (or three weeks) of television. No. More than that. This is squeezed out of over a hundred and fifty years of literary progress. This is a statement that is not simply made as a moral, but something that is positioned as the inevitable teleological consequence of the arc of history itself. It's also a literary claim; Doctor Who is being presented as the most powerful evolution of a hermetic spirit that has been animated within literature from the very beginning, and especially so in British literature. But no. It is even bolder than that. This is being presented as part of the BBC tradition of television theater - one of its oldest traditions. And the BBC is a public institution - something that is conceived of as performing a service for the country on the grounds that it is a just and moral thing to do. And it is with all of that laid on the table, all of that acknowledged and accepted as a necessary part of what it is the show does, that it delivers the secret to alchemy.

And it doesn't deliver it merely as a part of that duty - as if to say "Oh, yes, if a BBC producer happens to understand alchemy they should really put that on the air." It is far more than that. The secret of alchemy is shown to spring inevitably from the entire cultural and intellectual logic that underlies that duty. Out of the very moral and intellectual forces that turn the BBC from some broad philosophical statements to a living, breathing entity with a moral duty. From those centuries of intellectual, moral, and cultural heritage comes at last this message:

The solution to alchemy is material social progress.

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea (Mary Whitehouse)

This was originally a post that flowed much more directly from *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*, a relic of which can be found in my somewhat artificially imposing a cliffhanger on that post. Originally I had in mind to do a two voice thing, with the two posts in dialogue with themselves - one part would be left-justified and the other right-justified, which was a trick I used way back in *The Nintendo Project* to some effect. The idea was that one side would be the prosecution, accusing *Talons* and the Hinchcliffe era of moral failings, and the other would defend them.

The structure kept not working - it was too awkward to have to switch paragraphs every time I wanted to switch sides of the argument - but the basic arc of the two posts remained. *The Talons of Weng-Chiang* considered the good points of that story before deciding that the racism was irredeemable. And then this essay was always meant to play the other side of the argument, looking at how the series was taken down by Mary Whitehouse and then redeeming it.

But it hit at the exact right time to be something more. The Occupy protests, which I was fascinated by and sympathetic to, were going on at the time, and I was having a spectacular falling out with a landlord over a house that should have been condemned. I remember being holed up on my computer, which was on my kitchen table because the power had blown out permanently in the room of the house my computer was supposed to live in, dealing with a massive infestation of flies, and writing this post. The combined sense of being stuck in a black mold infested house and of widespread anger at fundamental economic unfairness provided a lot of the fire for this post, and the stars just aligned.

Occasionally people e-mail me to tell me that a post meant a lot to them. Often it’s this one. That always makes me happy.

It is, above all else, a profoundly stupid way to go down. Philip Hinchcliffe, after three years of making an enormously compelling case for why he is the best producer of Doctor Who since Verity Lambert, is given the sack in order to appease Mary Whitehouse, a sanctimonious prude of the worst sort. Three years of dark fairytale postmodernism with a flare for the cynically epic come to a close because of the incessant complaints of a crazy woman. Not with a bang but a whimper.

There's an odd justice to it, though. If the one aesthetic crime we can firmly get to stick to the Hinchcliffe era is hubris, there becomes a poetic justice to the era being taken down by a deluded fool with the visual literacy of a donut. It's oddly fitting that a show that is at times so cavalier about the material consequences of what it does should go down to a hack who should have been trivial to refute. Doubly so for it to happen under Robert Holmes, who isn't sacked here, but whose hatred for the banal evils of the world makes the show getting brought down by Whitehouse on his watch a particularly savage irony.

Let's discuss some facts then. One of those people who spent almost her entire working life as an old lady, Whitehouse was a high profile campaigner in the UK since 1964 on the issue of excessive sex, violence, and moral depravity on television and elsewhere. An outspoken and evangelical Christian, her initial battle of choice was with Hugh Greene, the Director General of the BBC when Doctor Who was created. It was under Greene that the BBC took its most concrete and visible steps towards a model of appealing to all of Britain instead of imposing the ideology and worldview of "establishment" Britain. Most concretely, this manifested in the production of things like *Z-Cars* or *Cathy Come Home*. Whitehouse, for her part, hated this; she believed that Greene was "responsible

for the moral collapse" of the UK, that he spread "the propaganda of disbelief, doubt, and dirt... promiscuity, infidelity, and drinking," and that the correct role of the BBC was to "encourage and sustain faith in God and bring Him back to the hearts of our family and national life."

It is possible, and many have done this, to look at the nature of this argument as an art versus commerce debate. This does not even involve ignoring the obvious theocratic implications - the UK is, after all, technically a theocracy, though it manages its condition well through a longterm regimen of secular democracy and keeps acute attacks to a minimum.

(Yes, it is technically a theocracy: the titular head of state is also the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, which is a state religion. The line between it and destructive theocracy is, in the case of the UK, one of active and continual choice not to do anything unseemly with the fact that they are ruled by a monarch who is also a religious figure. I don't even note this as a fault in the nature of British government - clearly they do just fine with this setup. Complain all you want about the fundamentals, the thing works. In practice, the US has more of a problem with theocratic lunatics than the UK does, so it's not like fundamental separation of church and state is a panacea or even, for that matter, particularly effective. My point here is really just for American readers - nthe claim that the correct role of the BBC is to bring God back into national life has a different relationship with the structure and principles of British government than it would with the structure and principles of the US government. You're not arguing against the grain of the Constitution there, in no small part because the UK doesn't have a written Constitution.)

Art, after all, in its more Enlightenment-infused senses has always been about the divine, with art being a tool that reveals aspects of the divine to humans. Even in the more secular versions of Enlightenment thought this tends to be fairly close to what art gets valued for. Or at least, it seems to be, because let's face it, secular versions of Enlightenment thought are, for good reasons, not the place most people go for aesthetic advice. From this viewpoint, the problem with Greene's BBC is that he is turning away from the production of art and towards mass-market commodities. This is the view that you get if you start pairing Greene off against the so-called Reithian model of the BBC. Wikipedia - I'll admit openly that's what I'm using here - describes the Reithian model as valuing "an equal consideration of all viewpoints, probity, universality and a commitment to public service."

There is a philosophical landmine here that we are going to have to pause on for a moment. Because that list of four values does not cohere. "Equal consideration of all viewpoints" and "probity" are necessarily in opposition. If you hold to a specific moral code, you necessarily consider some viewpoints - namely those antithetical to that moral code - as unequal in stature. That's by definition not equal consideration. Liberal democracy does not hold totalitarianism in equal consideration, at least not unless you dress it up in the rhetoric of self-advancement. There is no such thing as complete cosmopolitanism. And this point underlies the fundamental difference between two visions of liberalism that have been quietly and at times loudly coming into conflict throughout the period this blog has been tracking. And, for that matter, two visions that are still pretty much the big headline because philosophical shifts take place over decades and we're still playing this game.

The first of these two ideologies is Enlightenment liberalism. In this model, the application of human reason leads towards truth. Diversity of viewpoints is valued because of the belief that when the ideas argue against each other the right one will rise to the top. Democracy works because it will produce the best solution - the aggregate power of human reason is viewed as the best decision-making process available. So long as every viewpoint gets a chance to be heard, the right one will, seemingly inevitably, win out.

Postmodern liberalism, on the other hand, rejects this idea. At its most basic level, it rejects the

sort of hyper-sanitized purity of it. Democracy doesn't work because it picks the right option, it works because anything else is even crueler. (Which is, of course, basically the content of Churchill's famous line about democracy being the worst system of government. The transition from Enlightenment era to postmodernism was not a lightswitch event any more than the transition to science was. For one thing, you had to go through modernism.) Moral rightness does not inherently rise to the top, and it certainly doesn't do so with anything near the effectiveness that money and power do.

And so Enlightenment liberalism tends to mistake the desires of those with enough money and power to win elections for an inherent moral authority. The positions that are given "equal time" are really just sanctioned oppositions - there to be argued down and kept on the margins. Ultimately only those with access to the tools of reason - which, mysteriously, always keep being the tools of the upper class - wield actual power. This is the end problem with Reithianism: in the end, it sustains social inequity by continually making class judgments.

The response is Greene's BBC. And this is where the art vs. commerce angle falls down on this debate. Because, in hindsight, we have to realize that Greene's BBC was putting out some of the best art ever to be made for television, and thus that criticizing him for embracing commerce over art is nonsense. Yes, he did embrace commerce in ways previous heads hadn't, but he did so in a way that did not oppose it to art. Another way to look at this is to say that what Greene did was move the BBC towards a more postmodern sort of liberalism. He actually took seriously the idea that the BBC should equally consider all viewpoints and made television that came from multiple viewpoints. That's the whole idea of social realism: it gives the audience viewpoints they wouldn't be exposed to and shows them aspects of the world they didn't know about. Television, under Greene, isn't a device to show The Truth but rather a device to show more information, more perspectives, and more things in general. In this regard the idea that Doctor Who would develop under his watch seems like the most obvious thing ever.

There is still an embrace of cosmopolitanism here, but there's a fundamental difference in goals. Enlightenment liberalism embraces cosmopolitanism because it believes that a single "best view" will bubble up to the top. Postmodern liberalism embraces it because it believes that given a sufficient critical mass of views the worst views will wither and die, and that this is about the best you can hope for in terms of social progress. It recognizes that progress is not about approaching a defined goal of the future but about cleaning up the reiterated fossils that litter the present; that the march of history is not about the oncoming rush of the future but about the steady killing of the past. The production of new ideas and new perspectives is the material fuel that enables this, and is thus valuable. Postmodern liberalism values cosmopolitanism because cosmopolitanism breeds the conditions in which decaying ideologies are sped to their deaths.

But just as history repeats itself, as we've learned, so does the future. This finally brings us around to the earlier point I made about this being the start of the Long 1980s. It's not a big spoiler that the 1980s, in both the US and UK, were dominated by conservative politics. But there's a particular model of conservatism that we see here - one that's still enormously powerful and is still recognizable as what things like the Occupy movement are reacting against. And what's particularly insidious about this sort of conservatism is that it is in many ways the logical endpoint of Enlightenment liberalism.

In America this fact has become completely explicit, with the right wing clinging to the Constitution in a large part because they want to pretend that no significant developments in moral or political philosophy have happened since 1787. The Enlightenment is, in this context, unambiguously

treated as the last word on politics. (There is, of course, an odd fundamentalism to this - a decaying ideology reverting to its original form in a last, choking stab at purity of reiteration.) But more broadly, the right wing trades on an Enlightenment model of individual liberty. And for a variety of reasons, the most obvious ones being that the Enlightenment model of individual liberty was created by rich white men who naively assumed everyone else was basically like them, this model itself is corrupt. It's not a matter of misusing the model. Rather, it's one of utter fealty to the model. Libertarianism is little more than a proof by contradiction starting with the premises of Enlightenment liberalism in which everybody forgot what to do after you find the contradiction.

It should be no surprise that Whitehouse was, in the end, an ally of the Thatcher government. They shared, after all, a commitment to Enlightenment liberalism. The evangelical Christians that took Whitehouse seriously were part of Thatcher's base. They were not allies as such - in truth, Thatcher's ideology was always more economic than social. But they shared a hatred for postmodern liberalism, and a reliance on the idea of the "silent majority."

There are few concepts more insidious than that of the "silent majority." This is true for one very simple reason: silence is already antithetical to postmodern liberalism. If social progress is understood as the demolition of the past via the continual acceleration of new forms of thought then there is nothing more toxic to that than the idea of people who simply refuse to engage with the creation of new forms of thought. Silence, in the context of the silent majority, is nothing more than a refusal to play - a complete rejection of the idea that you can be challenged in the first place. If there is one point of view postmodernism is very, very clear on, it is that you should make a lot of noise. Preferably obnoxious noise.

Again, then, no surprise that Whitehouse's arguments, based as they were on appeals to this silent majority, were appallingly incompetent. She had been targeting Doctor Who since about *Genesis of the Daleks*, with her most famed line being a description of the show as "teatime brutality for tots." But the fuss she raised that ended up bringing Hinchcliffe down was due to the episode three cliffhanger of *The Deadly Assassin*, in which Goth drowns the Doctor. The director, David Maloney (who, sadly, never returns to the series following *The Talons of Weng-Chiang,* having been working on it off and on since *The Mind Robber*), opted to do that cliffhanger with a freeze frame on the Doctor's submerged head. And Whitehouse flipped out, claiming that children would think the Doctor's head was underwater for the whole week and would be terrified by not knowing if he survived, while simultaneously claiming, in what seems like something of a contradiction, that they would all try to drown their brothers. Which, I mean, you can kind of get some way of connecting those, I suppose, in which the show is teaching kids that you can hold your breath for a week, but, well... seriously?

I took a shot at this kind of thinking way back in the Hartnell volume, but let's be clearer here. Even if one grants some set of claims about the harmful effects of violence in the media on children - and notably, these claims have generally failed to survive any scholarly scrutiny - this position is indefensible for the simple reason that it is based on normalizing bad readings and sloppy thought. The failure to understand freeze frame only makes sense if you assume viewers who do not think at all about the technical properties of the medium at all in watching it. It relies on a naively immersive model of media in which television is a literal representation of things.

But look, we know it isn't. We know that camera angles and editing are part of how storytelling works. We know, in fact, that it's impossible to make sense of drama if you don't understand the conventions of visual storytelling. To say that a freeze frame suggests the Doctor's head being held underwater for a full week would require thinking that narrative time and audience time pass at the

same rate - an assumption that can't even be taken seriously. It requires that you think of a cliffhanger as a genuine source of danger for the character, and thus to think of Doctor Who not as a television show that exists in a real cultural context but as, to borrow a term from Gayatri Spivak, gossip about imaginary people - a look into the lives of people that could, in fact, simply die at any moment. It requires that the audience watch Doctor Who as found footage of real life as opposed to as a story. None of these are sensible things to do.

And these are not subtle, advanced issues. The "kids don't understand any of that" argument doesn't wash. These are fundamental aspects of how the medium works. This is basic visual literacy, not some advanced value-added extra. People learn this stuff instinctively. As I understand it (and I should note that developmental psychology is not my field), it's actually older people who have the most trouble with new-ish techniques like freeze frame because they've already learned visual literacy and thus have trouble with adding new dimensions to their understanding. Kids, as I understand it, pick this stuff up fine. Most people do, actually. It's only when they're misled by moronic zealots like Mary Whitehouse that the sense of functional visual literacy they develop by reading/watching is overwritten by idiotic aesthetics of "immersion" and "realism." Even if the episode three cliffhanger of *The Deadly Assassin* were a terrible thing that would deform children for years, it sure as hell wasn't for the reasons Mary Whitehouse said it was.

And this, more even than the censorship, is what I, at least, find so horrific about Whitehouse's arguments. It's not merely that they attack a show I love that provides what I think is a real social good. (Though I think in the end Whitehouse was either implicitly or explicitly aware of the degree to which the show's ideology was opposed to hers. Simply put, it's difficult to believe the idea of someone who watches and pays attention to a lot of Doctor Who ever agreeing with Mary Whitehouse.) It's the fact that she's doing it by mainstreaming visual illiteracy. It's the fact that on the way to "censor the violence" she insists on stopping off at actually and overtly endorsing uncritical and bad reading. If she had the integrity to actually accuse Doctor Who of being a left-leaning postmodernist show with Marxist influences, that would be one thing. Instead she just engaged in the narrative equivalent of climate change denial, peddling incompetent practices as something that should be taken seriously.

But, of course, the silent majority is absolved of all responsibility for this. Being silent, their views must be respected without argument, for no argument is possible. You can, of course, try to argue. Every viewpoint must be given fair representation, after all. But the opposition viewpoints are minority viewpoints. They occupy defined roles on the margins, existing only to be rejected in favor of the enlightenment of the majority, which need not argue its case when it can simply win elections. It doesn't matter how clever you are or how good your argument is, because in the end, you're talking to a brick wall.

This viewpoint was toxic enough when it was used to justify tuning out the counterculture in 1968. But in the 1980s it finds itself wedded to existing structures of power in the worst ways possible. This is, as is becoming increasingly clear, the real horrific legacy of the 1980s: the way in which neoliberal economic policies created the conditions for a media that actively propped up particular forms of ignorance when they benefitted those with power.

This is also where Whitehouse and Thatcher's ideologies part ways. There is no serious way to think that Thatcher's government, profoundly media-savvy as it was, actually believed the incompetent critiques offered by Whitehouse. Whatever one might say of the Tories in the 1980s, they were not stupid people. And there's ample evidence that Thatcher had little actual fondness for Whitehouse and her views. Unlike Whitehouse, Thatcher was invested in art vs. commerce debate.

Also unlike Whitehouse, Thatcher recognized Hugh Greene's BBC as art. It's just that in the art vs. commerce debate, Thatcher sided definitively with commerce, as she did in any "vs. commerce" debate. But Whitehouse was useful in that she could draw crowds, and thus corral the silent majority, which was a useful 10% or so of the population to have on your side. And as long as she directed it at mutual enemies like the BBC, Thatcher's government was happy to have Whitehouse around regardless of whether she made a lick of sense.

(I'd treat Whitehouse as a victim in all of this, but I can't bring myself to. She was a bigot and an idiot who understood nothing about television and wasn't going to let that get in the way of her crusade. She and Thatcher share their commitment to Enlightenment liberalism. Hers was, in the end, less devastatingly effective than Thatcher's, and so Thatcher won. As she usually did, unfortunately.)

The real point is that there's an ugly logic to this that is chillingly familiar: the use of power to sidestep the messy materialism of the battle of ideas, treating the fact of victory as an argument for the legitimacy of the victory. Which brings us back to that most inseparable of concepts for me with Doctor Who: bullying.

There are moments in life where you have a sudden and striking realization of just how fucked up a person you are. I had one about a month ago. I was driving past my old middle school - the school I was attending the year I got chicken pox and *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*. Somewhere in the decades since I left there, an annual tradition of a scarecrow competition began. Around Halloween, some class or another within the school makes big, colorful scarecrows and sets them up on the front lawn of the school. The scarecrows are generally in the form of recognizable pop culture icons: Spongebob or Spiderman or the like. And this year, there was a Dalek. And I found myself choking up at the sight of it not just the first time I drove past, but every time I drove past. It was a flawless impression of the presumptuous pathos with which adults view "It Gets Better" ads. (Those being bullied tend to view them with an air of "so stop screwing around with the webcam and make it better, jackass.")

I talked last time about the degree to which being an American Doctor Who fan in middle school in 1993 was a miserable experience. And we'll eventually get to 1993 and play that story out right alongside the Doctor Who I was reading. But I should perhaps stress the depth of the crap that was waded through. On two separate occasions people stole Doctor Who books from me and defaced them.Once the torn up remains were shoved in my desk, the other time I got to see them kicking the book around the hall. The defense was predictable - that these people, who had been mocking me for liking this weird Doctor Who thing they'd never heard of for months, were somehow unaware that the Doctor Who books they were destroying were mine. Because, I mean, there were lots of other people they might plausibly have belonged to.

My middle school had, while I was there, an overt policy called "restitution" in which, instead of handling misbehavior punitively, decided that the two sides of a dispute should come to a mutual understanding and that someone who does something to hurt somebody else shouldn't be punished but should have to make it better. On paper this all sounds very nice. In practice, it was a disgusting system that served bullies above all else. For one thing, it was toothless - even if the school had the authority to, say, make students replace the destroyed books (i.e. to actually make the harm better), importing obscure sci-fi books from the UK wasn't something anybody in Newtown knew how to do in 1993 besides my mother. In practice, nobody even tried to make them offer restitution in such a materially useful sense. What restitution actually meant was that both parties would be forced to apologize to one another regardless of what actually happened.

But even if they had actually attempted to make it right, the idea that bullying can be undone is

farcical. Even if the immediate damage is subsequently undone, the real damage of bullying is the longer term knowledge that people are going to hit you. They're going to hit you because they don't understand you, or because they view your intelligence as a threat, or maybe just because they feel like hitting you. And no restitution undoes that lesson.

And so I choked up at the sight of a Dalek scarecrow outside my old school. Because the idea that over the course of nearly twenty years my popular culture actually won out to the degree that it's possible to have a team of four middle schoolers who build a Dalek in art class and don't get the shit kicked out of them for it was... somehow just too much for me. I was utterly overwhelmed by it.

So for a fucked up lunatic like me, it's impossible, in 2013, not to see the vicious extent to which the ideological legacy of the 1980s is one of bullying. There's no other explanation for news stories about a bank specializing in foreclosures holding a halloween party in which their employees freely mocked the people they were busily throwing out of their homes. There's no other way to read a description of police pinning nonviolent student protesters to the ground and forcing pepper spray down their throats. There's no other way to read yearlong jail sentences for stealing bottled water during the London riots while ignoring the poverty that led to the riots. In every case there's that familiar overexertion of power - the need to demonstrate it for its own sake. And of course there is. Why settle for the banality of evil when you can have the probity of evil. The decent, hardworking middle-American cops of New York City can be trusted to beat socialist hippie dirtbags exactly how they deserve to be beaten.

And, of course, bullying is in its own ways intertwined with the excessive brutality of fan politics, within which there are too many stories of unconscionable acts of sheer nastiness to even sort through effectively. And this is a legacy that spills into the modern show, from the utter hate-fests that review threads on forums turn into right up to the *Doctor Who Magazine*-published fan who tweeted just a few days before I wrote this essay about the inherent worthlessness of a PhD in media studies and how you should beware Doctor Who fans who have them. (Wonder who he was talking about.) None of this is new, of course - I'm not saying that bullying was invented in the 1980s. Rather I am saying that it is impossible to understand the 1980s without understanding the way in which bullying works.

Let's start with a definition. At its most basic level, bullying is the use of power to cause harm when the power is not being used in accordance with the purpose (if any exists) for which it was granted. That doesn't mean that breaking up an illegal protest is bullying. It does mean that holding a nonviolent protester down and pepper-spraying them is. Let's further add a few clarifications. Bullying specifically means the use of force, whether social or physical. Inasmuch as it explains why the person being bullied deserves negative treatment, the explanation is generally based on who they are as opposed to what they've done - they're a nerd, or they're gay, not "they insulted me for being dumber than them" or "they triggered my own neuroses about anal penetration and that made me angry." And bullying carries with it the threat, implied or explicit, of future punishment. The nature of this last point varies heavily based on who's bullying. A sixth grader's threat of further punishment amounts to little more than "and I'll hit you tomorrow too." When you get into powerful political figures making bullying comments, on the other hand, the threat becomes much broader and more ambiguous. But this ambiguity does not keep it from being clearly understood by its intended audience.

This, rather than the actual aggression, is the worst part of being bullied. In the moment, there is enough adrenaline to distract you from a proper consideration of the situation’s horror. No, the worst moments are the long amounts of idle time you get to spend constantly formulating escape plans. What

seat on the bus gives the driver the best view of you? Which piece of playground equipment is least likely to have anyone bother you? What do you say that gets him not to hit you? It's the way in which your world re-orders to be about avoiding getting punished for existing in it. So that the existence of people who want to hurt you is just something you assume.

Then come the lessons. That there is no reasoning to be done with the people who want you to suffer. That in the end, they want you to suffer because they can make you suffer, and because they can get away with it, so that means it's OK. Whether because the laws that govern it are soft enough to make it de facto legal - as bullying under restitution basically was - or because they have the ability to lie effectively. When raw wealth owns the entire media then it is far too easy to say that you didn't know who's Doctor Who book it was, or that people might think a cliffhanger lasts an entire week diegetically, or that the proposed health care bill contains death panels.

These are the legacies of the 1980s. An economic ideology that fostered profits above all else created a world in which power justifies its own use and where the maxim that history is written by the victors becomes a moral principle instead of a cynical observation. Were these the legacies on display at the start? No. We'll get in time to the Winter of Discontent and the circumstances that brought Thatcher to power. But as Magnus Greel revealed to us, the future recurs as well. To go into the Long 1980s pretending that their consequences were other than what they were is foolish.

And this is what makes the Hinchcliffe era getting brought down in an early skirmish of that larger culture war so sickening. Whatever the flaws of the Hinchcliffe era - and there were, as we saw last entry, many - for it to be brought down by feckless bullies is just crushing.

But, of course, it's only the Hinchcliffe era that gets brought down. Doctor Who survives. Gravely wounded, yes. And arguably, as I've said, you can start tracing a direct narrative of Doctor Who's cancellation starting here - a chain of creative decisions and reactions against past creative decisions that ends with the show finally losing all support at the BBC. But then, other shows Whitehouse took on (*Till Death Do Us Part*) got cancelled outright under her assault. Doctor Who survived another twelve seasons, then came back for another run of, to date, at least eight. Whitehouse lost. We won. The Dalek went up outside the middle school.

But how? This is, after all, the real question. Because one thing that quickly becomes clear when dealing with the conservative ideology that stemmed from the 1980s is that Enlightenment liberalism is completely unsuitable to the task of resistance. This is because, as I said, what rose in the 1980s was not, in fact, opposed to Enlightenment liberalism but was the logical conclusion of it. Like any ideology surviving past its time, it becomes malignant. New ways forward are necessary. Or, to put it another way, there's no way to fight back against bullies within their rules. That's the other big lesson. The rules are never going to help you.

This is the other story of Doctor Who in the 1980s. Not a replacement for the story of how a great show finally slips and lands in it, but a counterpart to it. A story about learning how to fight bullies; a story about surviving. If the first phase of this blog - the Long 1960s - was about the history of utopian ideology as told through a British science fiction series, then this is, at its heart, the history of the marginalized and the counterculture as told through the same series. This is a history of freaks and weirdos of various sorts, whether self-identified or mockingly identified by the people who hate them: Punks, homosexuals, goths, fanboys, women, racial minorities, and nerds, to name just a few. It's a history of how marginal culture works, and of how it finds ways of wielding power. And of how marginal culture gets steamrolled, kicked, and beaten down.

Here, then, is our first tool. Because even after everything that could be found to criticize about *The Talons of Weng-Chiang*, when watching it some part of me, fresh from choking up at a paper

mache Dalek, was busy bringing an eighteen-year long wait to a delighted end. For all the deep-seated cynicism of that story, there is also a sense of manic glee to it - a telltale whiff of mercury, if you will. A refusal to slow down or to allow boredom to happen. A driving mania. It is giddily, madly, delightfully fun to watch. It's screamingly obvious why it's been ripped off so many times. It's funny, it's exciting, it has a wonderful and friendly clever wizard who runs about being brilliant. It is so blessedly fun to watch, and fun to love. This in and of itself has power. Once one accepts a position on the margins, one of the most savagely effective moves one can make is to have the unmitigated gall to enjoy yourself there - to act as though one would rather be there.

And then there is also the same thing we began the Hinchcliffe era looking at: fear. As I have said before, there are few purposes more fundamental to children's fiction than completely screwing up children for life. The best children's fiction disturbs and unnerves. And for all its flaws, *The Talons of Weng-Chiang* does. Heck, the cackling, snorting madness of Mr. Sin is unnerving even as an adult. But it is, oddly, its ending that is the most satisfying in this regard. The climax of the story is a straight lift from the first episode of *The Ark in Space* - an attempt to hide as something shoots laser beams at you. It's an odd sort of symbolic unity for the Hinchcliffe era, with the first and last episodes shown each using the same plot point. It serves as a reminder that, in this regard, the era put its best foot forward, establishing from the start the thing that would really shape its legacy - a sense of giddy, terrified suspense that guaranteed that it could not be forgotten, not completely. And as we know, if something can be remembered...

History repeats itself. And now the dizzying, endlessly complex horror of the Hinchcliffe era is history, freed to happen again and again. Held in the memory of a generation of freaks, waiting patiently for their time to come.

Beaming with Vast Intelligence (*City of Death*)

Thatcher was a hard subject to deal with on the blog, and I don't know that I ever got it quite right prior to the Sylvester McCoy era, when the program started engaging with Thatcher and Thatcherism directly. Prior to that, however, this was probably my best shot - an attempted foreshadowing of the vibrant anti-Thatcher counterculture that remains one of my favorite aspects of British culture.

City of Death, with its skewering of the very idea of cultural treasures and tradition, is a perfect vehicle for that, but really, that's not surprising given that it's a near perfect story and one of the most delightful things Doctor Who, or really any other television show, has ever produced. There's a grand and wonderful British tradition of valorizing thieves and con men as heroes, and the Doctor almost fits into it, but is usually constrained by the series' need to remain conventionally moral. *City of Death* is the rare example of putting the Doctor in one of the genres he's actually best suited for: the heist/caper film.

This entry contains the most recklessly obscure joke in the blog. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," an essay discussed extensively in this entry, contained in its first English language edition a horrendous misprint in the final sentence that completely reversed the meaning. I thought it would be funny, in an article about forgeries and fakes, to discuss the "wrong" version of the essay. Absolutely nobody has ever laughed at this joke.

It's September 29th, 1979. The Police are sending out an SOS to the world. By the sales figures it appears that rather a lot of people got their message in a bottle. So, mission accomplished then. Still, they send it out for three weeks before The Buggles notice that they are radio stars and kill them. Blondie, The Commodores, Michael Jackson, and Kate Bush also make the top ten. XTC and The Damned sit lower in the charts.

In real news, the Hong Kong MTR opens, Nigeria brings an end to military rule, and Pope John Paul II, fresh from getting the ball rolling on the eventual collapse of the autocratic government of his native Poland, goes to the United States. Tragically, he's less successful there, though barely a week after his departure a massive gay rights march takes place in Washington DC. A tsunami hits in Nice, a tornado in Windsor Locks, Connecticut, and a mob of pro-government thugs hits a newspaper and the home of the opposition leader in Malta.

While on television, we have a terribly unpopular story that no reputable fan enjoyed. No less an authority than John Peel, who later went on to helpfully fix the continuity errors introduced by *Destiny of the Daleks*, explains that the story is "pure farce," that "the acting was once more appalling," that characters were "so stupid as to be unbelievable," that he "couldn't believe that this was Doctor Who" and that it was "getting completely on [his] nerves." So there you go. And to think, Miles and Wood spend two pages in *About Time* asking whether we should take one of his books seriously.

Speaking of Miles and Wood, this is the story in which their dueling style of review finally leaps into hilarious self-parody. Miles (quite correctly) proclaims that "it is, of course, one of the best things ever" before engaging in a review that consists almost entirely of explanations of why nothing else in the Williams era works as well as this. Wood, on the other hand, spends most of his critique explaining why Miles is wrong and the rest of the Williams era is as good as this. All well and good except for the rather massive lacunae in the middle of it whereby they both fail to talk about this story. (On the other hand, Miles, in describing how sitcoms work, does inadvertently pin down the central

appeal of this section of *About Time* - "two people who don't like each other, trapped in a room.")

Continuing in my designated role as the unwanted third wheel to that particular odd couple, then, let's look at what's actually going on here. First of all, let's concede a core point to Lawrence Miles. Regardless of what one thinks of the rest of the Williams era, and for my part that changes every few sentences, this is head and shoulders above not only the remainder of the era but frankly above virtually everything to have aired in the series previously. It is searingly, jaw-droppingly good, and Tat Wood misses a trick in arguing that this works for the same reasons the rest of the Williams era works. I mean, what's good about it is wholly consistent with the rest of the Williams era, but what's really important here is what is absent.

Here Miles is basically correct, and this gets at the central problem with the previous story, which Miles saw as a program at war with itself. It is, sure, but the war is simpler than Miles makes it out to be. Miles suggests that the problem is the tension between the program's "tradition of fantasy adventure" and its current attempts at comedy are at fault, but no, it's really just one of those. The weaknesses of *Destiny of the Daleks* were almost all because of the ways in which the story tried to be Dan Dare-style space adventure. Its flaws were that it was trying to be for sci-fi fans.

This, more than anything, is the central premise that needs to be refuted. For one thing, it's a premise that is behind almost everything that's going to go wrong for Doctor Who in the 1980s. Doctor Who has never been for sci-fi fans. Sure, it was sci-fi for a while - most obviously in the 1960s. But that doesn't mean it was for sci-fi fans. The 1960s were an era where science fiction was popular in general. All sorts of stuff was popular then, and ordinary people liked science fiction. It wasn't until the falling off of popularity after the moon landing that science fiction entered a period of being marginal and for a particular subset of fans. This, ironically, is the real legacy of *Star Trek*. It's not a notable program for its popularity, it's a notable program for its failure. It's a notable program for the fact that only a small core of hard-core devotees liked it, as opposed to the larger, broader audiences who had been enjoying science fiction only a few years earlier.

It's only after about 1970 that doing science fiction meant doing it "for fans," and it's notable that for the bulk of the 1970s Doctor Who spends almost all of its time trying to be anything but science fiction. It spends five years moonlighting as a military thriller before going off and becoming a horror series for three years. Even in the Williams era you see it trying desperately to avoid being sci-fi in the conventional sense. It's only the popularity of *Star Wars* that creates the horrible gravity of sci-fi for the series. One of the most remarkable things about the period from 1975-1984 in the series is that it's a nine year stretch in which there are only three Dalek stories despite the fact that the series had the rights to them. It was one thing for the Daleks to vanish from seasons 5-8 while Terry Nation took his ball and went to America. It's quite another for them to vanish from seasons 13-16 when he didn't.

But this was what the 1970s producers of Doctor Who realized - that sci-fi in its conventional sense was a marginalized ghetto of a genre that only a few die-hard adherents liked. The fact that those adherents glommed onto Doctor Who from the era where it was most sci-fi (namely seasons 3-6) wasn't just irrelevant, it was an annoyance. You can still see vestiges of this problem if you're foolish enough to go onto GallifreyBase (and I confess that I regularly am), where you can witness the bewildering spectacle of people complaining about *The Doctor, The Widow, and the Wardrobe* on the grounds that it was "too Harry Potter" and that trees with souls aren't sci-fi. The problem with this perspective, and it's a truly bizarre one, is that many of these people appear to genuinely believe that an explanation about biopsionic luminescence or some similar piece of made up technobabble would have made the series more entertaining - as if hearing random science prefixes smashed

together is actually pleasurable unto itself. Which, I mean, clearly for some people it is, but let's be honest, that's a paraphilia, not an aesthetic.

So the first and foremost thing to realize about *City of Death* is that, like *The Ribos Operation* before it, it's one of the first Doctor Who stories to learn the correct lesson from *Star Wars*, which was that after twenty years of science fiction being popular and another ten of it being irritatingly present due to its fetishists science fiction was so well-understood that you could just use its trappings for whatever you wanted. (This is why the moment in *The Phantom Menace* where the entire audience realized that the prequel trilogy was going to suck was not, as many claim, Jar Jar Binks or the poor portrayal of young Anakin, but rather the line about midachlorians, which suddenly and painfully revealed that George Lucas actually thought anyone was confused or puzzled by the question of why a Muppet in a swamp had psychic powers.)

In some past entry I noted that the central brilliance of Doctor Who is that it realizes that once you have a big establishing shot of a Dalek fleet you can have the remainder of the story be the Doctor and Davros sitting in a basement chinwagging. And that's what's so thoroughly brilliant about City of Death. It spends all its sci-fi time on one model shot and a creepy alien mask and then uses that as a frame for a story that's really about Tom Baker and Julian Glover insulting each other for 90 minutes with Douglas Adams dialogue. Which is fantastic, because the BBC is fairly lousy at sci-fi action sequences, but remains as good as anyone in the world at putting a camera on Tom Baker and Julian Glover while they insult each other for 90 minutes with Douglas Adams dialogue.

What doing it as science fiction lets Adams do, however, is to use the basic fun of having Baker and Glover going at it to tell a much bigger and more interesting story than could be told in a more ostensibly "realist" genre. The real heart of this story is based on the idea of authenticity and fakery. Miles and Wood cite a bunch of quite good stuff on the difference between "worth" and "value," but if you really want to get at the heart of what's going on here you need to go for Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

For the most part in this blog when I opt to natter on about Marxism I have favored the French Situationists. Those for whom this blog is their primary window into the world of critical theory might therefore assume that the Situationists are the leading philosophical lights of Marxism. By and large I believe this to be true, but that position actually puts me outside the mainstream of humanities academia, which much more favors the so-called Frankfurt School of Marxists. (I think they backed the wrong horse appallingly here, and that Frankfurt School Marxism is mostly good if you want to feel smugly superior while smoking a lot of weed, which, to be fair, is actually what most Marxists in the humanities are going for) Benjamin is not actually of the Frankfurt school, having died before their foundation, but he's tremendously formative to them. Perhaps more to the point for our purposes, however, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," his best known piece, formed the basis of John Berger's 1972 television series *Ways of Seeing*, which means that the ideas were thoroughly "in the air" in British culture.

The basic idea of Benjamin's essay is that modern media have created a fundamental shift in art in which the aspects of art that gave it power, which Benjamin names the aura of the work of art. Aura describes those aspects of art that are unique to the original - the fetishistic and almost mystical power of the real, authentic object. Benjamin suggests that mechanical reproduction has brought an end to aura, and that this means that art is "completely useless for the formulation of revolutionary demands in the politics of art."

It's the notion of aura that is most immediately relevant to this piece. In effect what Scarlioni's scheme has allowed him to do is to create seven versions of the Mona Lisa all of which are real - that

is, all of which have aura. This (and not the spaceship stuff) is the real central sci-fi concept - the idea that it is possible to (quasi)mechanically reproduce aura itself.

The first and most obvious consequence of this is that the existing structures of art become transparently absurd. This manifests at various points of the story. In the way most relevant to the plot, of course, we have the basic absurdity of seven different collectors all of whom would be willing to buy the stolen Mona Lisa despite the fact that they could never show it to anyone, just for the sake of owning the painting. But the single most flagrant moment of mocking the absurdity of the art establishment is of course the John Cleese/Eleanor Bron cameo, which is a joke about the idea of imbuing a mundane object like a Police Box with aura simply by putting it into an art gallery and absent any actual artistry.

The real joke, of course, is that the TARDIS already possesses an aura of its own - one that Cleese and Bron's characters are wholly incapable of grasping even if they don't realize it. Having created a world in which even aura itself can be reproduced through Scaroth's machinations Adams introduces the Doctor in all his mercurial glory. Here Miles and Wood nail how the Doctor is cast perfectly. If Scaroth is the one who can mechanize aura, the Doctor gets to play the role of Tom Keating.

Tom Keating is one of those people who properly understood that the only real way to become a folk hero is to become a master criminal first. Keating was an exceedingly talented art forger, which is not in and of itself a way to endear yourself to the public. But his real genius was not merely his ability to make stunningly good fakes but his ability to use them to unleash conceptual terrorism on the art world. Essentially, pissed off at his own failure to break into the art world on his own paintings he decided to just start taking the entire art world down a host of pegs.

This meant that not only did he make convincing forgeries of all manner of art and sell them to private collectors, he was a magnificent dick about it. He refused to provide a list of his fakes even after he was caught, he'd deliberately use one or two anachronistic techniques or modern materials in making an otherwise wholly believable painting, paint a layer of glycerine under the paint so that when the painting was eventually cleaned it would self-destruct, or, and this is obviously the key one for our purposes, write messages under the paint that would be revealed if the painting were x-rayed.

Keating's paintings, befitting of his genius, now sell for thousands of pounds themselves, and there are forgers of his works now too. He is in this regard the postmodernist's dream - a producer of artifice that becomes real in and of itself. And, of course, in *City of Death* the Doctor manages the exact same thing, slipping a copy of the Mona Lisa with "This is a Fake" written on it into the Louvre itself.

In this regard Adams inverts Benjamin's rather dystopic view of the world, showing how even in an age of mechanical reproduction art is, in fact, completely useless for the purposes of fascism. The "moral" of the story as such is the point that the Mona Lisa is valuable not for its financial value but because of its beauty - because of the worth of looking at it. In this regard, of course, it situates itself in explicit opposition to the neoliberal ideal. Scarlioni serves as a high culture version of the right-wing war on art subsidies and their insistence that art should be able to pay for itself. Having six extra Mona Lisas created is in this regard a move of considerable genius - the ultimate Thatcherite expression of how art should work. (And note how Scarlioni bends the entirety of human history to the purpose of pulling off his scheme. Literally all of human history turns out to build up to a profit-making scheme. He really is an arch-Thatcherite.)

And the Doctor outdoes him not with some defense of art but with Tom Keating. Scarlioni figures out how to mechanically reproduce aura itself, so Baker one-ups him by just deflating aura

and draining art of its ritual power. Crucially, however, the story's attack on art does not stop there. City of Death is itself packed to the brim with stray bits of fakery. Some of these are small scale, and even potentially accidents: a French cafe showing English language news, the fact that Scaroth's proper Jageroth head could never fit inside Julian Glover's, or the utterly motiveless removal of the Julian Glover mask just to generate a cliffhanger. Others are more clever - the joke about whether the Doctor and Romana should "fly" down the Eiffel Tower that sets up an apparent moment in which they do in episode four, or the insertion of a fake "skip" in the tape in episode one. And, of course, there's the big one: the fact that the plot resolution, far from being about the Doctor and his cleverness, is really when the brute force detective slugs Scaroth. The story itself, in the end, turns out not to be a Doctor Who story.

But of course, all of this dances around the real beauty and truth of it. The ultimate example of fakery in any given Doctor Who story is, of course, the Doctor himself.Whether it be his propensity for impersonation or simply bamboozling his way into the halls of power, the Doctor has always been the charismatic faker. His Doctorate is, by all Earth standards, non-existent. He makes almost certainly fabricated claims about having met historical figures. Even his very body turns out to be a forgery of the human form, and he continually reveals, through odd ticks or turns of phrase, his lack of authenticity. From day one when he turned out to be a fake grandfather in a fake police box living in a junk yard and sending Susan to school under a fake identity, the Doctor has been a forgery.

All of this, of course, would be mere cleverness were it not built on the foundation of a fantastic piece of character-based comedy. The cleverness and trickery is there, yes, but that's not why the story was so popular. Nor, notably, was the ITV strike that left it as the only television in town. Sure, it helped and boosted the ratings, but notably the fourth part went out after the strike was over and ITV had resumed normal programming, and that was the episode that hit Doctor Who's all-time ratings high. No, the reason this was so watched and so beloved is simple: it's hilariously fun.

Because at the end of the day, that's the heart and soul of this story. All of the great little lines, from Scaroth, from the Countess, from Romana, and, of course, from the Doctor himself. It is raucously, brilliantly funny, and no surprise given that it's written by one of the best comic writers of the 20th century in any country.

And notably, this is also the real political content of the story. This is why it serves as a rejoinder to Benjamin's idea that art, once mechanical reproduction robs aura of its power, becomes a tool of fascism. Because in the face of a villain who has bent the entire teleology of human progress to capitalist production the Doctor and the series itself, through glorious and unrepentant fakery, remind us of the single most crucial and effective refutation of Thatcher and the neoliberal program that there is. This story isn't just great, it's another one of the definitive shifts and developments in Doctor Who's basic philosophy.

And this is something that has shown itself more and more clearly as time has gone on. Watching it in 2011, one of the most striking things is how much more like the new series it is than anything else around it. Even today one of the most straightforward paths to successful Doctor Who is to be like *City of Death*. Even on a level of basic formula, this is the first story in which nearly everything the Doctor says or does is a witticism. It's the first time a writer has really gotten the Doctor to work so that he can simultaneously constantly clown about and constantly be seriously working on saving the world. The Doctor chalks his relaxed attitude up to being on holiday, but this is a fake as well. The Doctor's always on holiday. That's the point of him. That is, in fact, the heart and soul of the series political radicalness.

(And unsurprisingly it's Gareth Roberts, whose admiration for this story and this era of Doctor

Who outstrips almost anyone else's, who can nail this story's style the best. *The Lodger* and *Closing Time* are almost effortless executions of the *City of Death* formula. And how perfect that the villain of *The Lodger* turns out to be, indirectly, the Silence - another race who bent humanity to their own purposes. Even their line in *The Day of the Moon* about having been there for fire and the wheel echoes Scaroth's claiming of credit for those exact two inventions.)

It is not, I think, a coincidence that the Thatcher era coincided with such an explosion of art and culture that I adore - that so many great writers and musicians established themselves during it. The reason for this is simple: this countercultural artistic production is the most fundamental weapon in existence against the right. We alluded to this back in the Mary Whitehouse entry, but here we can codify it fully.

Scarlioni can print money, wage war, and divert the entire course of history to his purposes. So let him. Let him have the institutions of power, the control over the artistic world, let him have everything. For all of that, the Doctor, in all his fake and mercurial glory, still wins for one simple reason. He's more fun. Thatcher's subsuming of postmodernism is, in this regard, ultimately and necessarily incomplete. She can take control of much of it, yes - allow the fluid nature of signifiers and the subjectivity of memory and history to serve her purposes. But there is one aspect of the postmodern that can never, ever be bent into the service of oppression. And over time, it is this aspect of it that will always win out. This is the true inevitable force of history, and the one the Doctor embraced when he rejected the Time Lords' hollow and vacant joke of historical inevitability to run off on perpetual holiday. It is the content of every one of his victories and the moral force behind every moment of rage he shows.

And it is the one thing that Thatcher, fatally, lacks. At the end of the day, she's just no fun.

A Pathetic Bunch of Tin Soldiers (*Earthshock*)

There's a reasonably popular forum with an entire thread devoted to how much they hate me and my blog. This is to my enduring pride, as being popular enough to have a dedicated hatedom is a clear sign that you're quite popular indeed. Along with my post on *Enlightenment*, in which I make some terribly obvious and well-supported statements about how Turlough displays some stereotypically homosexual traits and how this was probably done consciously, the post on *Earthshock* is their very least favorite post. So I assume that it's one of my best.

That it attracted some disdain is perhaps unsurprising, as this entry fits into the classic and never entirely popular genre of taking a tremendously popular story and explaining why it shouldn't be nearly as popular as it is. For obvious reasons, nobody particularly likes it when you do that. Still, there are corners of Doctor Who fandom that have bred the most terrible things, and the corner that adores *Earthshock* is, for the most part, one of them.

One of the occasional frustrations of writing this project as a blog is that I realize seasons later what I should have said. Almost all of the critiques this entry makes about the way in which this is a particularly cynical and vapid vision of Doctor Who connect perfectly to the critique I made a few months later in *Attack of the Cybermen*. I've included that essay as well, so you can play the fun game of figuring out all the connections I should have made, and then in mid-2014 when the Peter Davison/Colin Baker book comes out see if you're right. It's like interactive fiction!

For my money, the sentence "Also, syzygy!" is the funniest thing in the entry, which is why authors should not judge their own work.

It's March 8, 1982. Tight Fit are still sleeping with a lion, and continue to do so all story. Fun Boy Three and Bananarama, ABC, and Iron Maiden also chart. So that's all terribly exciting, isn't it. Let's try the news - the US starts its embargo against Libya. That will end well, I'm sure. Mary Whitehouse's attempt to prosecute the play *The Romans in Britain* for obscenity goes down in flames when it turns out that the witness who claims to have seen a penis on stage could not possibly have actually done so, proving a delightfully high profile defeat for Whitehouse. Also, syzygy!

While on television we have *Earthshock*. A story I've been hemming and hawing over what to do with almost since this blog started, hoping that watching it would in some sense clarify things. It didn't really. This is, for me, one of the most inscrutable of Doctor Who stories. No, the thing that really clarified what to say about this story was actually doing revisions on the Troughton book and rereading what I'd written about the base under siege era.

The bulk of my writing on that subject focused on the way in which the base under siege became formulaic and boring, and it did. But a second strand that crops up throughout the entries is a process of contextualizing the stories in the changing tastes of Doctor Who fandom. This is, admittedly, an issue through large swaths of the blog, and it's one that's obviously growing in importance in this era. But redoing the Troughton entries reminded me vividly of the large faction of fandom who considered the base under siege format to be the absolute pinnacle of the series.

I did not much like that section of fandom when covering the Troughton era. And back in the *Kinda* entry I remarked, with some venom, that the crux of what was wrong with Doctor Who in the 1980s is that it took a section of fandom seriously. And this story is the flip side of it. Kinda was at the bottom of the Season Ninteen poll. *Earthshock* was at the top, and is still, broadly speaking, regarded as the best episode of its season. And this gets straight at what's a bit tricky with

Earthshock, which is that it's tailor made for the crowd that thinks that bases under siege are the be-all and end-all of Doctor Who.

For the most part, *Earthshock* is an astonishingly straightforward story. Cybermen attack Earth. Twice. The pleasures it offers are straightforward pleasures. There are Cybermen. There are gun battles. Things explode. It is a story that operates under the complete and unfaltering confidence that having action sequences involving classic Doctor Who monsters is inherently worthwhile television.

Given that premise, *Earthshock* is, if nothing else, as good as Doctor Who ever got at this. Over the entire run of Doctor Who, including the classic "monster" era of Troughton and the "Action by Havoc" era of Pertwee, this is the best the series did at a straight action story. It moves at a brisk pace, has reasonably competent action sequences throughout, and has a pair of genuinely striking moments with the surprise appearance of the Cybermen and the death of Adric. It makes the clever decision to take the base under siege format - traditionally a six episode structure - and break it down to two linked two-parters so that the action actually moves at a real clip. If what you like about Doctor Who is its action sequences then this is rightly your favorite story. Even if that's not what you like about Doctor Who, there's admittedly a kind of infectious fun to this one. It's sheer glee at reenacting various iconic Cybermen moments is catchy. Lawrence Miles describes it in *About Time* as a guilty pleasure, and he's absolutely right. If you're a Doctor Who fan who is capable of being invested in the fact that the Cybermen are reappearing then this story is a real hoot.

The problem is that so much of fandom seems unaware of the "guilty" part of guilty pleasures. The stereotypical social awkwardness of the science fiction fan occasionally, in the case of Doctor Who, spills over into an odd aesthetic awkwardness. Put another way, people are inexplicably of the belief that the faults of this story are more excusable than those of *Kinda* when it comes to showing Doctor Who to a general audience. This is very strange. *Kinda* has two major problems, both of which center on its conclusion. The first is that the conclusion is emotionally vacant, the second is that the conclusion focuses on a terrible giant snake. But as problems go, this second one is an interesting one. First of all, the superficially obvious problem that the snake is rubbish helpfully distracts from the scripting problem underneath it.

But second, and this is particularly key, there's actually something fun about a dodgy giant snake. For all that people mock the bad effects of Doctor Who it's genuinely easy for fans or non-fans to get a kick out of them. Science fiction is established enough that poor effects are part of its charm. And this was true by 1982. The purpose of special effects is often their visibility - the question of "how did they do that." And thus a bad effect still fits into the basic grammar of special effects. It's just an effect in which the question of "how did they do that" is all too answerable. And so a good story with terrible effects is not only something that the general public is more than capable of accepting, it's something they actually can generally be counted on a perverse enjoyment of. There's a camp glee to a bad effect. (I've long thought that a brilliant piece of science fiction television would be to take top notch scriptwriters and then just produce their scripts on an appalling shoestring budget with good actors and competent directors who are just unabashedly directing men in rubber suits, glove puppets, and wire models.)

Whereas *Earthshoc*k is frankly nearly impossible to love if you're not a Doctor Who fan.

Consider, for instance, the much vaunted episode one cliffhanger. Remember that a key part of the appeal of this cliffhanger is that the return of the Cybermen was a genuine surprise and that nobody knew it was coming. Then look at how it's actually done. The Doctor refers to whoever is controlling the android, then we cut to the people controlling the android as one of them shouts "Destroy them! Destroy them at once!" And, of course, the people controlling them are Cybermen.

But this is never actually stated. I mean, it's not a huge botch - the Cybermen are well known villains that a fair portion of the audience legitimately would have recognized. But the impact of that cliffhanger depends 100% on the fact that the audience is going to recognize the Cybermen and care that they're back. To anyone who is not at least a casual Doctor Who fan the cliffhanger looks like the people controlling the androids are, in fact, more androids. And yet people seriously believe this is somehow more appealing to people than a story where the only problem is a poorly done giant snake.

But there's a larger issue at play here - one that gets back to the sorts of comparisons we dealt with back in the bemusing *Space: 1999/I Claudius* entry. And that's that the BBC is not exactly great at doing space action-adventure. *Earthshock* is by far the most competent that the classic series ever got at imitating *Aliens* and *Star Wars*, but this is not exactly what you'd call an accomplishment in the grand scheme of the genre. The BBC just can't do this sort of thing all that well. This manages "not a disaster," which is a tremendous accomplishment for the BBC, but the fact of the matter is that if in 1982 you're pitching the major appeal of Doctor Who as space marines then it's pretty tough to account for why anybody would prefer Doctor Who to other things on the market.

The best account that presents itself is one of nostalgia - that this is Britain's great contribution to science fiction television and so is rightly beloved on those grounds. And so we bring the Cybermen back because they're the monsters that people remember from their childhoods. And we do space action because that's what science fiction is these days, and it's what Doctor Who did so well in the Troughton and Pertwee eras.

Ironically, of course, it's John Nathan-Turner's own maxim that dooms him here. The memory cheats. Not in the sense he used it - which was to suggest that old Doctor Who wasn't as good as people remembered it being - but in the sense that people don't remember why something was good years after they watched it. Yes, the scene of Cybermen bursting out of their tombs in *Tomb of the Cybermen* was absolutely fantastic, but it turns out to have been one of about three good moments in the entire story. It stuck in the memory, sure, but it wasn't the heart and soul of the series, it was just the bit that stayed with you a decade later.

This is the biggest problem with the "monsters" model of Doctor Who. The sad truth of the matter is that Doctor Who was never all that good at monster action. Over the course of its nearly fifty years it has had some gloriously brilliant monsters, but most of them were the product of a particularly good BBC design team or of particularly inventive writing. The Daleks are good because Raymond Cusick hit the things out of the park. The Weeping Angels are good because they're a quintessentially British version of a J-Horror monster. But the fact of the matter is that the Ice Warriors didn't come back because green lizard-men from Mars are a good idea, they came back because the costumes were bloody expensive and had to be justified by re-use. And when the costumes wore out the Ice Warriors were never seen again, and with good reason: they were dumb.

This, more than anything, is responsible for the sort of sad and pathetic status of Doctor Who fans. It's not, as with most genre fans, that they liked something unpopular. Doctor Who has, even at its lowest moments, enjoyed a measure of genuine respect in Britain. It's telling that "Doctorin' the TARDIS," KLF's gloriously trashy Doctor Who themed single, hit number one during the Cartmel years at the absolute lowest ebb of the series actual popularity. Even in the worst days of the 1980s the series enjoyed genuine theoretical popularity. No, the sad thing about Doctor Who fans has always been what they liked about Doctor Who. It's always been that they genuinely thought the series was about its monsters and its thrills.

And at the end of the day this is where I have to just draw an aesthetic line. Because I'm on the other side of that debate. I couldn't care less about the series as an action serial and the points where

it becomes one are the ones that interest me the least. For me Doctor Who is interesting because of its inventiveness, and while I can get a guilty thrill out of mimicry of other popular texts of the time I cannot invest myself in the idea that it's what Doctor Who is for. Doctor Who isn't a chameleon just so it can consistently fail to distinguish itself in any meaningful sense from anything else around it. In this regard the two Saward scripts in Season Nineteen are in many ways my least favorite of the set - and I even include Time-Flight in that assessment. It's not that *The Visitation* and *Earthshock* have no ambitions other than entertainment - that's something I'll never really fault Doctor Who for. It's that they have no ambitions other than recreating other things. There is no spark or creativity anywhere in them. Can I enjoy them? Yes. Absolutely. But I cannot bring myself to love either of them. They have next to none of the animating spark that I genuinely love about Doctor Who.

But in the case of *Earthshock* I'll push that critique one step further. *Earthshock* has the unfortunate distinction of airing two weeks before the Falklands War breaks out. I am not actually going to cover the Falklands War in massive depth - I have a different Pop Between Realities post planned in the next season gap. But its a soberingly problematic moment in British history. There's not really a way around the sense that the war was, if not wholly motivated by the fact that there would have to be an election soon, at least firmly conducted with one eye on the polls. The Argentinian side - a fading military dictatorship in desperate need of a propaganda coup - was certainly no better, but the sudden reversion to raw militaristic jingoism in the UK was genuinely chilling, doubly so because it worked so well in the 1983 general election. Similarly, those inclined to despise Rupert Murdoch and *The Sun* have little evidence substantially better than the paper's war coverage and reflexive support of the Thatcher government.

So to see Doctor Who, two weeks before the war broke out, running a story in which even the Doctor ends up as an action hero wrestling a Cyberman and rubbing gold into its chest plate before Nyssa guns it down, and where the main supporting good guys are just space marines with big guns is... dismaying. In the worst days of the UNIT era there was at least a sense of tension between the Doctor and UNIT. Pertwee's sort of drag action man, the camp sensibility of UNIT, and the fact that Pertwee even at his worst had at least some visible tension with authority figures all cut against the myriad of problems introduced.

Because the fact of the matter is that the military is, by definition, a tool of establishment power that prioritizes brute force and is organized according to an authoritarian focus on conformity for its own sake. There's no way for the military to be anything else. This isn't a statement of pacifist belief or anything along those lines - it's simply an acknowledgment of how an organization like the military needs to function. And thus the Doctor - mercurial, anarchistic, and intellectual - is at the core of his concept at least mildly hostile to the military. That doesn't mean the Doctor is a pacifist. That doesn't mean the Doctor must always oppose the military. But it does mean that using Doctor Who to blindly and uncritically valorize the military is deeply problematic.

I don't want this observation to be read as a critique of Saward's politics. In his next scripts he displays considerably more skepticism towards the military, and one gets the sense that he grasped the problems of this story in hindsight. But the fact remains - on a fundamental, ethical level someone who loves the bulk of Doctor Who ought to have some problems with this story. If you're the sort of person who likes Doctor Who then, quite frankly, you really should be the sort of person who likes subversive and mercurial play on and around a concept more than you like militaristic action.

There are two other things to talk about with this story. One I'm going to punt to Monday when I do the exact Big Finish audio everybody has been assuming I'm going to do ever since I started doing Pop Between Realities posts. The other is the death of Adric. This gets back to the sort of running

theme of this entry, which is that fandom has a very warped sense of what works in television. The death of Adric is, for the sort of orthodox fandom that heralds the return of the Cybermen as inherently worthwhile, one of the great moments of drama in the series and a triumphant confirmation of how John Nathan-Turner has discarded the silliness of the Graham Williams era and become a serious program again.

It is difficult to take this even remotely seriously. Part of this is because Adric was a crappy character. But what's remarkable is how little effort was even expended on trying to make his death work dramatically. He doesn't die heroically in any way, shape, or form. He dies because he runs into a crashing spaceship to prove that he's clever. His last words, "now I'll never know if I was right," are so outlandishly smug that it is impossible to even figure out what Saward thought he was doing with them. And on top of that Adric gets an extra heaping of annoying scenes in the first episode that work towards setting up a voluntary departure and, on the side, reminding everyone of why they hate him.

But this gets at a larger issue, which is that there's an overt cynicism to the entire thing. It's not just that killing a companion is obviously a bit of a stunt, it's that they consciously picked the companion that was going to be least missed. If you're going to have the Doctor fail and have a companion die, fine. It's probably something worth doing every couple of decades just to forcibly broaden the possible horizons of what Doctor Who can do. And while the tragic departures of Rose and Donna are in every sense better versions of killing a companion, the fact of the matter is that it remains an effective way of increasing dramatic tension. The Doctor will save the day, yes, but there's a possibility of an egregious price to be paid.

But to do it with the companion that is going to have the least emotional impact is just cheap. If you want to go down that route, do it in a way that's going to matter to the audience. What we get here isn't drama. It's the hollow shell of drama - a major character death, a silent credit sequence, a few minutes of horrified and morose main characters at the tail end of this and the start of *Time-Flight*, and then everybody - the audience included - moves on. It's not one of the most dramatic sequences of the 1980s. It's a cheap sham designed to look like drama. It's a sequence designed to rile up controversy - the exact sort of death scene that would be created by an executive who believes that art should "soothe, not distract." It's there to make people watching the show feel like they're watching serious drama without making any effort at being serious drama. Just like the supposed emotional plot arcs all season have been the hollow shells of character drama instead of actual character drama.

So, fine. Thrill at the reasonably well-done action sequences. Enjoy the hell out of Davison and Sutton's acting around Adric's death, which really is, in both cases, damn good. Even enjoy the ridiculous macho posturing of David Banks as Cyber Leader if you want. Take your guilty pleasure from it. Fine.

At the end of the day, this is Doctor Who for people who read *The Sun*, two weeks before it becomes horrifyingly clear what that really means.

The Original Viking Settlers (*Terminus*)

If *Earthshock* belongs to the subgenre of essays about why beloved classics of Doctor Who shouldn't be, *Terminus* belongs to its opposite, and probably my favorite sort of entry: ones about why widely hated Doctor Who stories are secretly brilliant. Unfortunately, *Terminus* only gives you so much to work with, it being an appallingly paced and put together story.

Still, those can be the fun ones in many ways. Some of the most fun bits of *TARDIS Eruditorum* to do are the ones where I wildly reinterpret bits of Doctor Who, and *Terminus*, in its intense mediocrity and unfulfilled ideas, provides an appealing canvas to scrawl a new reading of things onto.

There was a point when I mistakenly thought that I loved learning details and stories from various mythologies. This turns out to be almost, but not quite true. What I actually love is learning the moods and attitudes of various mythologies, and the Norse idea of lurking monstrosities from a previous universe is one of the most interesting, containing all the stuff H.P. Lovecraft gets praised for inventing, only, you know, a millennium or so early. The possibility of framing the Doctor in those terms was delightful, and a theme I'll play with again in *The Curse of Fenric*.

It's February 15th, 1983. Kajagoogoo are finally at the top of the charts, prancing about for both weeks of this story with one of the great pieces of 80s trash. Michael Jackson and Tears for Fears also chart, making this perhaps the single most 80s chart we've dealt with yet. Fitting, that.

News is relatively quiet. Some particularly bad fires in Victoria and South Australia, a multiple homicide in the robbery of the Wah Mee gambling club in Seattle, and the Environmental Protection Agency announces plans to completely and permanently evacuate Times Beach in Missouri due to an excessive amount of deadly poison in the soil.

While on television, *Terminus*. There was, in the drawer of VHS tapes that constituted the initial guiding principles of my Doctor Who fandom, a tape on which the words "Terminus" and Enlightenment" were written and crossed out. The tape now contained a track meet. This is one of several standing grievances between my parents and me, along with my not being allowed to trick or treat when I was a child and their failure to buy a life-size Dalek when they had the opportunity. Some day I will put them in homes and laugh at them.

The result of this is that when I finally got my hands on a copy of *Terminus* I was positively chomping at the bit to watch it. The fact that I remembered virtually nothing about it going into rewatching it for the blog, then, was a bit unnerving. As I've noted, there are few worse omens when talking about a Doctor Who story than to say that it was forgettable as a child.

And this is doubly true of the Nathan-Turner era. Every era of Doctor Who has its poor stories. The realities of BBC production mean that sometimes Doctor Who has no choice but to go to air with a story that self-evidently sucks. And there's an inverted history of Doctor Who from the one we've usually followed, in which eras are described and understood by the best of what they strove for. We could instead ask what various eras do when it's clear they have a turkey on their hands. And it is, in many ways, just as revealing as the optimistic history of the show. Verity Lambert, for instance, tries with a sort of manic desperation to do something interesting. The Lloyd/Bryant/Sherwin era just grimly grinds out the story figuring that the audience doesn't actually care what's on screen, leaving Patrick Troughton to shout "oh my word" a lot. The Pertwee era tries desperately to avoid ever making a turkey, slowly sacrificing quality at the altar of not screwing up until they make a horrific

string of turkeys as a result. The Hinchcliffe era maintains reasonable production standards throughout, and its turkeys are defined almost entirely by whether or not Robert Holmes could be bothered to even try to fix the script. And the Williams era just dials up the charm in a frantic effort to salvage script after script that goes wrong.

The John Nathan-Turner era, on the other hand, has just about the most depressive relationship with its own failures imaginable. Whereas the Williams era, for the most part, is spurred into action when it's clear that circumstances are conspiring against them, the Nathan-Turner era goes into the grimmest sort of autopilot imaginable, essentially just depressedly going "right, we're doing a poorly made runaround on a generic space station and we really don't care." With Nathan-Turner himself never moving out of the first stage of grief and just grinning maniacally as he insists that the story worked and was good and the memory cheats and please please love me.

What makes this really weird, though, is that for most of the Nathan-Turner era this process is almost but not quite entirely unrelated to the quality of the script. The Nathan-Turner era will periodically go to the mattresses trying to make a classic out of a story with a script that is never going to make one and, equally, will occasionally just decline to lift a finger to help a brilliant script. Which brings us to Terminus, which is tedious, poorly made, clearly as boring to everybody in it as it is to anybody watching it, and by one of the best writers to work on the classic series. Perhaps the most shocking thing, when watching Terminus, is trying to figure out how this could come from the pen of the man who'd written Warriors Gate, and who is one of a handful of classic series Doctor Who writers to have a writing career that spans functionally into the present day. The answer, of course, is that it didn't. What this story appears to be is not at all what is actually going on in the script.

Lawrence Miles, defender of the Davison era that he is in *About Time*, gives the start of an explanation, which is that this is meant to be Wagnerian space opera. This is not, in and of itself, a winning concept, but it's at least an intriguing one. Miles suggests that the story should have been played entirely in sweeping, epic gestures, with everything overplayed and shouted thunderously, preferably made with a cast consisting of an endless sequence of clones of Brian Blessed.

It's a start, certainly, but only a start. Miles's vision of what this story could have been is intriguing, and it's certainly true that there are occasional flashes of that sort of epic glory. The skull image that appears within the TARDIS to provide Nyssa her way off the ship is one of the most chilling images in the series, and the crowd of Lazars clawing and milling around everybody is one of the best efforts at straight scares since the Hinchcliffe era, although let's be fair, that is a relatively small pool to be swimming in, and one that has Mandrels in it.

Equally, it's true that the things that fall short of the epic fall short with an unfortunate vigor. The degree to which the Vanir are bored middle-aged men arguing with each other is deeply unfortunate, as is the failure to choreograph any of the fight scenes with even a modicum of quality. And it's tough to muster any love for the casting of the space raiders, who are so 1980s that it causes physical pain even if you're enormously fond of the decade, as I am. It's also frustrating that Nyssa is left to simper and be abused through so much of the story, again in a story that was ostensibly meant to focus on her. Tegan and Turlough spend the majority of it crawling around in ducts, but for all that she actually does in the story Nyssa might as well have been there too. Her actual departure is handled with pleasant dignity, but as usual Sutton mostly demonstrates how frustratingly wasted she was on the part, and thank god for Big Finish so that we have an idea of just how much that's true. All three companions seem to shrink in the face of the story just as much as the story's supporting cast does. But Miles's account isn't the full account of it either.

Still, let's start with what Miles does say and is right about and build off of it. At the heart of this story is a sense of cyclical cosmology built on the idea of ancient orders of things that have survived in partial forms. Miles makes much out of a concept that is elided in the televised version, which is that the space ship is a relic from a previous universe whose destruction brought about the creation of our universe. In this reading the end solution of the Garm managing to hold back the lever and reverse the explosion is not, as it initially appears, just about a superstrong wolfman. It's about the idea that only something from the old universe can properly interact with the ship. It's not supposed to just be a question of strength, but of a sort of narrative teleology - the fact that the old universe has its own rules separate from our universe.

It is worth reflecting, then, on the Doctor's role in this. Unlike *Warrior's Gate*, it is not true that his role is one of strategic inaction. But it's also true that the Doctor does relatively little here. This is, of course, not that unusual for Doctor Who, where the plot often consists of the Doctor figuring things out so that other people can do things. But it's still worth making the exact format of this within Terminus explicit. The Doctor is a wandering outsider who gains knowledge about the fundamental workings of the universe and uses it to preserve the order of things. Within the Norse context of the story at large, the correct term for this person is "Odin."

I mention this because there's a train of thought that really peaks in the late McCoy era and into the New Adventures (particularly those written by Paul Cornell) in which the Doctor becomes an overtly Odinic figure. It is an interesting role to cast the Doctor in. Certainly Odin is a mercurial figure - indeed, he's rather unique as gods go in that he is at once a martial, patriarchal figure and, for the most part, a trickster archetype. He is still defined first and foremost by cleverness and an ability to outfox people. And he is in many ways a natural fit with the idea of the Time Lords, particularly those of *The Deadly Assassin*. His ravens, after all, are named thought and memory.

There is an important transformation that happens here - a sort of steady refocusing of the lens of the series made necessary by time. Early on the Doctor is most visibly allied with some form of Hermes. But as he becomes increasingly entrenched in culture this changes. (Indeed, one theory, admittedly based largely on Tacitus making shit up, casts Odin as being derived from Mercury. But even this fraudulent theory carries some potency - a sense of the Roman pantheon slitting its own throat in a desperate bid to evolve into something weirder.) Even as the actors playing him and his superficial tropes become progressively younger he gets played as an older and older figure. Hartnell may be the most "old man" Doctor, but he plays the Doctor as a sort of giddily mercurial patrician. Davison, on the other hand, plays him as a weary young adventurer.

But more to the point, when the program is facing its twentieth anniversary there is an extent to which the Doctor cannot help but be a figure of the establishment. Once you're the longest-running science fiction show in the world you are, in a necessary sense, an institution and a part of the establishment. That doesn't mean that the Doctor has to abandon his sense of the anarchic. But it requires a change. To some extent this has been lurking since the Pertwee era, as the Doctor has become increasingly sage. It's not until the 1970s that it becomes the norm for the Doctor to know a lot about a given situation before he arrives and to be able to rattle off extensive facts about settings off the top of his head. Indeed one of the interesting things about Davison's Doctor is that this sort of extensive foreknowledge is temporarily and partially stripped away again (particularly in the two Bailey stories, which overtly hinge on the Doctor's lack of knowledge in a way that would never have happened in the Baker era).

But Davison's Doctor, equally, is not a return to the Hartnell/Troughton mould. He may be without extensive knowledge, but he's also wearied in a way that Troughton never was and Hartnell

rarely was. And if one extends the scope out from Davison, treating him as the model for future Doctors (and it's fair, I think, to say that his approach defines how at least five of his six successors play the part), he rapidly starts to look like a reconceptualization of the Doctor as an Odinic figure instead of a Hermetic one. In Davison he is overtly a "young" Odin - the wandering figure gathering wisdom and knowledge. But this merely prefigures the more explicitly Odinic natures of McCoy and all three of the new series Doctors. And Terminus, spiritually, marks that transition point.

But Terminus, as written, has depths beyond what Miles points at. Yes, it's Norse space opera, but that's just a cool style. Oddly prescient in its casting of the Doctor, yes, but on its own it's not entirely functional without slathering of "sentient metafiction" more liberal than even I'm eager to lay down. It's enough, perhaps, to elevate it to *Time Monster* territory - brilliant ideas that just go terribly, terribly wrong. But there's a second layer to *Terminus* that Miles doesn't pick up on.

The clue actually comes in something Tat Wood points out when he snarks about Saward's tin ear for dialogue, complaining about how the line "do they think we're stupid or something" got changed to "they must think us fools!" It's a poor rewrite, to be sure, but the most striking thing about it is that it does actually completely meet Miles's assertion that everything is supposed to be overplayed as if by Brian Blessed. What's more telling, though, is what it replaces - a line of frustration that is framed and played as working class employees grousing angrily.

This is something Gallagher has played with before. *Warrior's Gate* also featured a spaceship crew that was visibly coded as working class. But that was under Bidmead, and now we're under Saward, who scuppered a script by Pat Mills in part because Mills wanted to do the story with a visibly working class captain whereas Saward wanted to portray only classless futures. So all of the class issues that Gallagher put into the script are systematically removed. The Vanir were, in the original conception, working class gods. On the one hand given names of Norse myth and made to stride around in armor and on the other hand tired, worn out, and screwed over wage slaves. This cuts right to the core of them as designed. They're literally living paycheck to paycheck - actual wage slaves dependent on the Terminus Corporation's shipments of Hydromel to survive. They have no choice but to work, and the need for them to do their work obliges them to be completely blind to the needs of the sick people in their care.

Likewise the Garm turns out to be a wage slave from a previous universe, bound into servitude and finally set free from his wage slavery when he saves the universe by waking up and doing something for the sake of it instead of because he's ordered to. Or, to put it in blunter political terms, the Garm attains class consciousness and is freed by it, thus facilitating the subsequent freeing of the Vanir. The cyclical structure of mythic history is explicitly wedded, in other words, to a sort of Marxist dialectic of history. Only Saward, in his infinite wisdom, preferred a depiction of a classless future and took it all out.

So we're left with two *Termini*. One is a Marxist Norse space opera that clearly flags the transition of the Doctor from a Hermetic figure to an Odinic one while maintaining an explicit connection to the idea of alchemy as material social progress. The other is a poorly paced story about bunch of middle aged men grousing around a shoddy space station in silly costumes. Unfortunately, of course, it's the latter one that actually aired. And unlike something like *Creature From the Pit*, where the fault is fairly concretely pinnable on one person's head, here it's a systemic failure - a case of nobody bothering to give Gallagher - whose previous effort had been good in part because of the striking visuals - the sort of production attention he needed. But through the horrid pallor of neglect and tedium the last remnants of *Terminus*'s old universe still rage gloriously. The result is one of the odder critical endpoints I've found myself resting on - a story I absolutely despise for the way in

which it serves as an effaced memorial to one of my favorite Doctor Who stories ever.

Things Which Act Against Everything We Believe In (*Attack of the Cybermen*)

The Colin Baker era was, to say the least, a challenge. One of the basic principles of *TARDIS Eruditorum* is that it likes Doctor Who and tries to avoid slagging it off. But it's exceedingly tempting, and frankly easy, to treat the Colin Baker era as a string of eleven straight abject failures. Eventually I hit on the idea of treating the season as an exorcism - a long, dark night of the soul that was redemptive in its failures.

Thankfully after *The Twin Dilemma*, which I did just go ahead and slag off, I had *Attack of the Cybermen*, an arguably even worse story that nevertheless happened to feature the Cybermen, a set of monsters I created an elaborate metaphor for back in their first appearance. My use of the word "qlippothic" (pronounced kip oth ick, rhyming with "apothic") is something of a running joke among some of my commenters, and I admit that it is one of my more self-indulgent bits of jargon, but the basic image of a nightmarish and degenerate mirror to humanity is a wonderfully chilling one, and works perfectly with this era of Doctor Who, which seems constantly to be trying to suppress the sense of brilliant wonder that suffused earlier eras.

Nevertheless, I couldn't resist putting in the potshot about Saward and Levine each taking the credit for this story instead of shifting the blame. Bitchiness may be the lowest form of wit, but it's terribly satisfying sometimes.

It is January 5th, 1985. Band Aid are at number one with "Do They Know It's Christmas," a song that will have spectacularly unfortunate results for Doctor Who in a few months' time. They remain at number one through the story, with Wham! at number two with another Christmas song. Foreigner, Madonna, Paul McCartney, Tears for Fears, and Ray Parker Jr. are also in the charts, the last, of course, with the theme from Ghostbusters.

So in the news, since last we looked at a story, The Soviet Union decides to boycott the 1984 Olympics essentially in protest of the US boycotting the 1980 ones four years earlier. So that's another thrilling series of events. The Indian government storms the holiest site in the Sikh religion to remove Sikh separatists, killing 2000. Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, is assassinated by her Sikh security guards a few months later, which, you know, there's something to learn there. The other JN-T, John Napier Turner, becomes Prime Minster of Canada. And is ousted three months later. The UK agrees to return Hong Kong to China.

While on television... The obvious putdown of *Attack of the Cybermen* is that it finally and demonstrably shows just how bad both Ian Levine and Eric Saward are, in that both of them take credit for this story instead of frantically trying to shift the blame onto the other. But denouncing *Attack of the Cybermen* is almost too easy. And anyway, I want to take a different line on Season Twenty-Two.

In writing this blog I have found that eras of the show tend to work in one of two ways. The first category are eras whose aesthetics are relatively straightforward, in which case readings of stories tend to be based on exploring the particulars of those aesthetics and pushing readings a bit further. Much of the the 1960s, along with the Hinchcliffe and Bidmead eras, worked like this. The second are what one might call the problem eras - chunks of the show where how the show works is contested and I have to spend a lot of time trying to figure out how to read the show in the first place instead of getting on with it. The Pertwee, Williams, and Davison eras were all like this, with entries having to go back and forth on questions like "what is the show actually trying to do here" for large

swaths of it.

The Colin Baker era is something else - an era that doesn't work, but that doesn't work in such a consistent and straightforward manner as to not require a lot of explanation. The era's flaws have almost completely been sorted out with *The Twin Dilemma*. This story adds continuity porn to the list, but that's a flaw we largely sorted out during the Davison era. The same logic applies to most of the era. I try to write this blog so that someone who isn't intimately familiar with the history of Doctor Who can follow it (part of why I did opt to retrace much of the existing critical consensus on the Davison era), but in this case there's almost no point. For every story this season you can safely assume that everything that went wrong in the Davison era happens about twice as much, and everything that went right happens at best half as much. You can take for granted that references to the past abound for their own sake, that the stories take active pleasure in violence and pain, and that Baker is interminably unpleasant due to writing that has the childish tendency to assume that less likable characters are inherently edgier and thus more dramatic. You can also assume that the switch to forty-five minute episodes was poorly handled and that the pacing is screwed to hell and back. So I'm mostly not going to reiterate any of that unless there's something particularly interesting about it. Take as read that the next six stories are not very good and that most of the existing criticism of them is at least vaguely on target. So that's all sorted then.

Similarly, having done "The Agony and the Ecstasy of John Nathan-Turner" over the course of the Davison era, I want to put the travails of the production team aside for most of Season Twenty-TWo, especially since the behind-the-scenes aspect has been hopelessly overdetermined with a wealth of partisan accounts. It won't be completely possible - I don't see how to talk about *The Two Doctors* without some behind the scenes chatter, for instance - but for the most part I want to focus on what's on screen in Season Twenty-Two and not on the sausage factory.

With *Attack of the Cybermen* there's an additional issue. I took my pot-shots at the last two universally despised stories, but as one of the things people say when they're saying nice things about my blog is that I come up with counter-intuitive and innovative readings of stories. So let's break the streak and ask a harder question, which is what a redemptive reading of *Attack of the Cybermen* would look like.

Interestingly, the angle of *Attack of the Cybermen* that most lends itself to redemption is also the one for which it is most infamous, namely its, shall we say, somewhat dense use of continuity. The most interesting aspect of this is the confirmation of the original role of Mondas in terms of the Cybermen. Much of the history of the Cybermen has, after all, been a matter of ignoring what they originally were, both in their role as Qlippothic others and, more basically, in the sheer ludicrousness of their original premise as a race that drove their planet up alongside the Earth and then exploded. Mondas has been mentioned since then, yes, but the actual original event of the Cybermen has been largely obscured.

Except here it's brought back, and in its full and original weirdness. When, in 1966, Pedler and Davis posited a 1986 arrival of Mondas it was an understandable move - yes, it was sure to look silly in twenty years, but worrying about how your 1960s science fiction television was going to look in twenty years would have been ridiculous at the time. But come 1985 the little detail of when the Cybermen arrived on Earth would seem ripe for ignoring - as, let's remember, most details of the past are even in these continuity-obsessed days. Instead, however, the fact of Mondas's 1986 arrival forms one of the centerpieces of the story.

The whole story, of course, is about the evocation of the past. But in most of these cases the past is evoked, not used. The Cybermen lurk about in sewers, because that's classically what Cybermen

do. We're back on Telos among the tombs because that's where Cybermen go. And, of course, we're in Totter's Lane for no reason other than the fact that we can be. There's a token attempt to link this all together into a "Whoniverse," a term I think I'll just repurpose to refer to the basic idea of even having that sort of coherence. But the real effect is a miasma of evocations of the series' past.

For all that one of its major influences is *The Invasion*, this story makes little move to take place in a London comprised of real and recognizable landmarks. It is telling that the shot the story slavishly reproduces is not the Cybermen marching down the steps of St. Paul's but rather the Cybermen bursting from their tombs, a shot removed from reference to reality, originally conceived of in terms of the genre tropes of mummy films. The only London landmark invoked is an imaginary one: Totter's Lane. Haley's Comet may loom over the story along with 1986, but the world of the story is manifestly not ours. This is a story that takes place among the series' past.

So in amidst the iconography of the series' past we unleash the idea of the original Qlippothic Cybermen. Not the things themselves, of course - these are the puissant action villains of *Earthshock* through and through. But the Qlippothic Cybermen are perhaps more unsettling as ideas than they are as actual presences. This story is consciously haunted by the 1986 run-in with Mondas, and thus the Qlippothic haunts it as well.

This is asking for trouble. The flawed fetishization of the series' past risks obscuring the fact that this past has always held more power than its worshipers give it credit for. One is not on solid ground when walking amongst the rubble of Doctor Who's past, and the illusory terra firma of the Whoniverse presents little real protection against exposure.

Can we make a redemptive reading that still acknowledges the story to be rubbish? To some extent, at least, that's the plan for this entire era - a misbegotten wreck of television that nevertheless seems to crackle alchemically. In one sense, after all, we have the ultimate narrative collapse story here. The Cybermen oversee a sudden hemorrhage of a quarter of the viewership week over week and then the series gets cancelled. There is no narrative collapse quite as thorough as the series actually getting taken off the air. And here are all the makings of that metatext. The Cybermen are allowed to run riot through Totter's Lane. It's fitting that this should come so early in the terminally long stretch of non-classics, particularly given that the next unambiguous triumph of the series will return again to this place with newfound alchemy.

All narrative collapses are averted at a price. It's tempting to say that this one's is that it comes too late - that the wound is mortal and an 18-month break in transmission, followed not long thereafter by a 16-year one, are inevitable. But perhaps a better option exists. It is notable that Doctor Who inflicts upon itself a symbolic wound right at the moment when, in a real, material, ratings sense everything goes off the rails. What, then, if we treat this era as a sort of Fisher King of Doctor Who? If Colin Baker's tenure is the cursed land ruled over by the wounded king created by this Qlippothic distortion of the very fabric of the series' identity?

The result is an era of exorcism. An era where the show rips itself to shreds in the name of excising its own weakness. In this reading, for all of *Attack of the Cybermen*'s flaws, it is in some sense a more interesting story than *The Five Doctors*, where all of Doctor Who's history seemed at last to be enmeshed in grotesque stasis. This is, perhaps the price of escaping that. What follows *The Five Doctors*? What ideas come after Longleat? It's not an easy question, given that both events strove towards a totalizing, definitive statement of what Doctor Who was.

The price paid for the escape from this narrative collapse is, perhaps, *Attack of the Cybermen* itself - or, more broadly, the Colin Baker era. To unshackle the history of Doctor Who from the grotesque chains of the Whoniverse may not be a task that can be undertaken by quality. After twenty

years perhaps the program has no way forward beyond tearing itself apart.

There's an odd parallelism to the overall cultural situation. As the miners' strike winds down to its crushing and deflated denouement we reach a point where the phrase "creative destruction" seems glaringly apt. For all that the moral arguments stack against it - the firm insistence that one cannot simply dismantle communities for profit - there is eternally an allure to burning it all down. This is the odd alliance between Thatcherism and mercurial anarchy. At the end of the day, both want to tear down the world.

For all the horrors of Thatcher, it's difficult not to point out that in areas other than Doctor Who Britain is in a bit of a cultural renaissance here. It's musically on top of the world, for all the flaws in Doctor Who there are all-time classics of television being made in this period. The British invasion of comics is in full swing, with Alan Moore making his transformative impact on the American comics industry. And much of this, albeit not all of it, is in direct reaction against Thatcherism. There's a compelling, if unintended, argument to be had here. This isn't the creative force the right wanted out of its creative destruction, but really, that's for the better. At some point we have to admit that hating Thatcher is something of a fetish - that she is the symptom we most enjoy.

There is a moment of logical sloppiness here that we ought resist, however. The arc of history is not a moral force. That something happened and its consequences approached progress does not mean the thing was right or good. This howling exorcism of Doctor Who - this self-inflicted wound to claw the Whoniverse out of the concept of the show - is not a good thing. It is not a necessary thing, except inasmuch as it happened and so, tautologically, must have happened. But it is a thing - a price paid. As, perhaps, is all of the Colin Baker era.

To be clear it is not that this is a bad story on the way to a good result. We'll save that defense for Season Twenty-Four. This is something subtler - a bad story that nevertheless constitutes a plunge into alchemical depths and starts a process that will begin to remove the flaws it represents - flaws which predate this story by some margin. I sometimes describe William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury by saying it is a book I love having read, even if I hated reading it. The Baker era was a disaster, but it was, perhaps, the right disaster.

At the heart of this is the character of Lytton, who rather unexpectedly finds himself thrust into the role of moral center of the story. The Doctor's final comment, taken superficially, is incoherently stupid - the fact that Lytton was working as a mercenary for the good guys surely does not constitute the worst misjudgment on the part of the Doctor given that he was previously and uncomplicatedly working as a mercenary for the Daleks. What, then, is the nature of this misjudgment?

Again, let us set aside what we know went on behind the scenes here and take the events on their own merits, reading not what we know Saward meant here but what appeared. There is no way to seriously suggest Lytton's redemption from what is on screen. The alternative, then, is that working for the Daleks is not so bad.

It is helpful here to turn back to earlier versions of alchemy, most specifically *The Ribos Operation*, which was an extended meditation on the problems of dualisms. A key part of that story was that differing levels of the system did not have 1:1 correspondence with each other. The true maxim turns out to be "as above, so below... more or less."

The Cybermen, of course, are the new Daleks - the classic Cybermen stories of the Troughton era are primarily about the fact that Terry Nation took his ball and went to America. In this regard they are differing iterations of the same system. But the Doctor's misjudgment of Lytton requires that we see a difference between them. Working for the Cybermen would have been unforgivable, but

finding out that Lytton only worked for the Daleks means that he's OK. This is not the only time this judgment is made in the Colin Baker era either - jump ahead and consider his monologue about the corruption of the Time Lords in *The Ultimate Foe*. He lists three monsters that are not as bad as the Time Lords - Daleks, Sontarans, and Cybermen - and delivers the line as if to suggest that being worse than the Cybermen is the real accomplishment here. Even in their first appearance, when we take them as the thing that persuades the Doctor that there are monsters that need to be fought, we are forced to realize that the Daleks were not sufficiently persuasive in this regard. The Cybermen have always been worse than the Daleks, both in the sense of being the second choice and in a diegetic sense.

The Daleks are merely the Doctor's opposite - the representation of death that threatens narrative collapse. But the Cybermen are the Doctor's corruption. They offer a living death - the possibility of continuing endlessly in a hollowed out, qlippothic state. In recognizing that Lytton is not that the Doctor attains some measurement of knowledge - the ability to distinguish the qlippothic from the real. But this knowledge comes, in a sense, too late - the qlippothic has been unleashed amidst the core of what the program is. This, then, is the true nature of the Doctor's bad judgment - he's been so unable to differentiate the qlippothic from the real that he's allowed the very narrative foundations of the series to be infested. The only remaining option is an exorcism, and likely a painful one.

Pop Between Realities, Home in Time for Tea ("Doctor in Distress")

I went back and forth on including this essay, as it is a bit of a stark denouncement of a specific person, which always feels a bit harsh to me. But on the other hand, so much of the Davison and Colin Baker material builds towards a denunciation of a particular view of Doctor Who, and nobody exemplifies that view quite like Ian Levine.

Levine is a very easy target, largely by his own making, and there were a lot of ways to approach this. Ultimately I tried to take him seriously, which was, depending on your perspective, either me playing scrupulously fair or me stacking the deck outrageously by ascribing careful thought to statements that were made without much of it.

But for me the real heart of this piece is the analysis of the hiatus - an event where fan lore has heavily overwritten actual historical evidence. There were a lot of partisan agendas there, and for all that Levine is difficult to like, I find him easier to sympathize with than either Michael Grade or John Nathan-Turner, both of whom seem far more cynical to me. Levine, foolish as he may have been, had straightforward and even sympathetic intentions. My hope is that he comes off more as a sad figure than a villainous one.

Much of this probably needs a bit of a rewrite in light of the biography of John Nathan-Turner that was recently released, but it's still a piece I'm very proud of. I still find reading it uncomfortable, but that seems appropriate for its topic.

I have for the most part avoided significant discussion of Ian Levine, typically gesturing to the fact that eventually I'd do this post. So let's take the bull by the horns here and lay this question out in its most damningly blunt form: can Ian Levine be blamed for Doctor Who's cancellation?

This is, of course, terribly unfair. Although no Gareth Jenkins, there's something that leaves a bad taste in my mouth about a sustained attack on Ian Levine's role in the series' history. At the end of the day, Levine in 1985 was a 30-year-old geek and acted the part. He was a poor spokesman for Doctor Who in the public eye, yes. But more than anything one feels bad for him for being put there in the first place. His biggest problem, in many ways, was that he played the role that the cancellation crisis cast him in - slightly maladapted uberfan - too well.

I'd also be lying if I said that, as a 29-year-old socially maladapted Doctor Who fan, I didn't have at least some visceral understanding of where Levine was coming from. Being an angry geek in 2012 is easy. There's a whole Internet for hard-headedly arguing on. And adamant as I am that one argues on the Internet for the entertainment of the lurkers, I'm not nearly daft enough to pretend that I don't like getting to vent obsessively on forums. Where do you think I learned to write two thousand words a day? I've been drawn inexorably into being a hard-nosed tit in Internet arguments too many times not to understand Levine. Time warp me into 1985 with no Internet to argue on and give me an in with the production office of Doctor Who and I'd probably smash a television as a publicity stunt too. At least Levine holds down steady employment, which is, let's face it, more than we can say for my overeducated ass.

And so to some extent one is left wanting to let sleeping dogs lie. 1985 was a long time ago. Ian Levine is nearly 60 now. At some point one has to stop blaming someone for dumb shit they did in their early 30s. And if nothing else, the 1985 crisis is a footnote in the history of a wildly successful show. Perhaps lingering axes to grind exist among those who were making the show - or at least those who are still with us - but it's tough to say that we the chattering public still have anything at stake in

this fight. We're not so much beating a dead horse as beating the empty space where once a horse carcass lay. These days Levine is mostly just another bloke with a Twitter who says stupid things about Doctor Who or DC Comics occasionally. So really, I'm one to talk.

And so I've avoided going too far into Ian Levine. But he can't be avoided entirely. For one thing, he presents himself as a central player in this time period to this day. If he's going to be one of the major interviews on the Trials and Tribulations documentary about the hiatus and the wreckage of the Colin Baker era, well, fine. He implicates himself in the judgment. For another, he's only mostly just another bloke with a Twitter. I've occasionally entertained myself by, when Ian Levine has come up in passing on the blog, noting that he has personally told me to go fuck myself. The context of this is illustrative - I rather indecorously called him out on Twitter over his fearmongering in the wake of the whole Private Eye/shortened series kerfuffle with regards to the new series last summer (I shouldn't have @replied him, for what it's worth - that was rude of me). Which is to say, if he's going to repeat the errors of 1985 and raise fearmongering panics over the future of Doctor Who, well, that, at least, remains perfectly fair game to criticize him for.

But perhaps most importantly, if most tragically, Levine serves as too useful a metaphor to let go of. He's not the only person to have views on Doctor Who like his. But he's the most high profile. And he was at the wrong place at the wrong time. His views caused measurable, definable damage to Doctor Who. I think a very compelling case can be made that were it not for some of his actions Doctor Who could have returned from its hiatus in a stronger position and that it needn't have gone off the air in 1989. Is he the sole architect of that failure? God no. But he's inexorable from it. And because he, both through his own actions and through the actions of others, got positioned as the archetype of a particular type of Doctor Who fan he serves, in many ways, as a symbol for a particular set of destructive impulses within fandom and their problems. Which is to say that, as with Gareth Jenkins, our collective disdain for Ian Levine is largely self-loathing.

Unlike Jenkins, though, I can't get around the need to deal with what Levine is a symbol of. And unlike Jenkins, there are things in his adult life that are valid sources of criticism. So with the knowledge that in 30 years time someone is going to nail me to the wall as the archetype of a disastrously smug postmodern turn in fandom, and that I will fully and completely deserve this fate, here's my one post of obligatory Levine skewering.

At the heart of my criticism of Levine, at least, is the fact that he is a shining example of why conflicts of interest are dangerous. He is, within Doctor Who, the original professional fan. But his professional status was enormously contested. He was the continuity advisor to the early John Nathan-Turner era, but this was explicitly and deliberately an unofficial role. In blunter terms, he was paid with access instead of money. This is just one example of what I've more broadly called the fan-industrial complex, but it's a real problem - Levine was simultaneously serving as the high profile voice of fandom while getting perks from the show. The result was that one of the go-to sources for quotes about Doctor Who fandom was, by and large, happy to serve as a mouthpiece for the producer.

What gives all of this an upsettingly cynical tinge is the fact that in the aftermath of the suspension crisis Levine was one of the large bloc of fandom that turned aggressively on Nathan-Turner. In Levine's account the breaking point was the casting of Bonnie Langford, but the fact remains that the overwhelming bulk of fandom abandoned Nathan-Turner following the cancellation crisis and Trial of a Time Lord. (Indeed, there's still traces of a fan orthodoxy that viewed the McCoy era as a disaster. While it's overstating the case to suggest that anybody who dislikes McCoy is guilty of this, the fact remains that a significant thread of McCoy bashing has its roots in nothing more than the fact that fandom decided in 1986 that anything Nathan-Turner did was rubbish.) This is, in many

ways, Levine's modus operandi, and it's a fair part of why he comes in for so much criticism - he's reliably among the first on the scene when there's some visible glory to be snatched, has an astonishingly bad track record in picking what horses to back, and is ruthlessly swift with blame-shifting once it becomes obvious that he's involved in a turkey.

As I noted at the time, then, there is perhaps no fact more revealing about Ian Levine than that he seeks to take the credit for *Attack of the Cybermen*. It is, after all, something of a rarity - the only other thing he actively takes a lion's share of the credit for is missing episode recovery, and there his contributions have pretty conclusively been shown to be overstated. (He did indeed find a few, but fewer than he says, and his self-proclaimed role in stopping the junkings ignores the tremendous role that Sue Malden played. This isn't to say, as some people attempt to, that he was uninvolved - he had some real contributions - but the legend exceeds the reality. Richard Moleworth's alarmingly definitive *Wiped* puts the number of episodes Levine both actually discovered and returned promptly to the BBC instead of sitting on them for several years at six. Levine did serve as a clearinghouse - the people who did find the episodes often went through him in returning them to the BBC - but his actual find count numbers six. This is still a lot, but it's considerably less than he claims. More troubling is the fact that in several cases Levine sat on missing episodes for some time before returning them to the BBC. Ostensibly this is because of collectors who had missing episodes but would only trade them for other missing episodes instead of selling them. The problem with this assertion is straightforward: no episode has ever been recovered in that manner.)

It is, of course, a mistake to suggest that Levine is purely or even primarily responsible for the series' continuity fetishism from Seasons Nineteen through Twenty-Two. But equally, the fact that Levine is actually eager to take the credit for *Attack of the Cybermen* points to the fact that he is as strong an advocate for such an approach as exists. Certainly all records of what suggestions over the course of his unofficial tenure as continuity advisor indicate this. And this gets at the heart of where Ian Levine, to my mind, starts to acquire some active blame for the series' cancellation. Because he believed the primary audience of Doctor Who was Doctor Who fans, and at a key moment in the course of the suspension the production team, using Ian Levine as their mouthpiece, doubled down on that view catastrophically.

Before any discussion of the suspension crisis it's necessary to try to square away exactly what happened. On February 27th, 1985, it was announced that Doctor Who would not be coming back for eighteen months after Season 22. Central to any interpretation of what follows, however, is what we think this announcement actually meant. The conventional wisdom is that the eighteen month delay was a front for an actual cancellation of the series. The reason this is widely believed, however, is deceptive: both Michael Grade and Ian Levine say it was, and since they're on polar opposite sides of this kerfuffle everyone believes it.

The trouble is that the actual evidence is thin on the ground. Certainly the initial announcements when the story broke were that it was an eighteen month break. Is it possible, as both Levine and Grade imply, that this was a case of breaking the bad news into small chunks and that after eighteen months the show was still not going to come back? In theory, yes. But it's worth noting that Doctor Who wasn't the only show cancelled in this period. *Crackerjack* and the other shows cancelled around this time were not announced as delayed - they were cancelled outright. So the very fact that Doctor Who's suspension was announced as a delay suggests strongly that it was, in fact, a delay all along. To think otherwise is to assume that the BBC was capable of long-term conspiracy. Put simply, there's very little evidence they were that composed or competent in 1985.

This raises the question of why Levine and Grade, who are otherwise proponents of seemingly

irreconcilable positions, find themselves allies on this point. The answer is much like the answer every other time, in the course of looking at history in this blog, we've found a fundamental alliance between two seemingly diametrically opposed positions - that there's another alternative position that both sides want erased. Because there's one tacit point of agreement between Levine and Grade, which is that Doctor Who is primarily for fans.

It's obvious enough why this position suits Levine, but one might fairly ask why it suited Grade. The answer is simple: Grade needed a pantomime villain to position his broader reforms of the BBC against, and Doctor Who fans were an easy target. Grade's mandate was to make the BBC more like a commercial broadcaster and less like the public service broadcaster it was. This is an unsurprising position to come upon in the height of the Thatcher years, where the idea of a public service broadcaster - particularly one that stubbornly refused to just be a mouthpiece for the government - was anathema. It was tremendously convenient for Grade to be able to position himself in opposition to a group as visibly pathetic as Doctor Who fans. Doctor Who was, after all, easily mocked. So Grade had a show he could rail against the production values of and have everyone acknowledge that he was right, then make a joke about how a small number of people stayed up all night in their parents' basement writing letters to complain and hit a known stereotype of Doctor Who fans. And then poof - he's saving the BBC for the masses from the clutches of some entitled man-children. How very convenient. And this is what people should hate Michael Grade for - not for cancelling Doctor Who, but for using its fans as his own private Arthur Scargill.

But we know that, by all appearances, he didn't really want to cancel the show outright. Or, at least, he didn't try to cancel it outright in 1985. Which leaves us with the uncomfortable implication that it was the Levine-fronted fan campaign to save Doctor Who that gave Grade the opportunity he needed to make Doctor Who into his punching bag of choice. And here we begin to approach the erased alternative to what actually happened.

It is worth noting that there was, in fact, a massive wave of popular attention directed towards Doctor Who during the suspension crisis, with both *The Sun* and *The Daily Star* running "save Doctor Who" campaigns. The former is explicable enough - they were fed an almost certainly fictitious line about how the BBC was trying to bluff the government into giving them money and jumped on it as part of their standing hostility to the BBC. (The fact that Michael Grade's later career is as a Tory peer in the House of Lords suggests that any theory based on him wanting to start a fight with the government is speculative at best.) But T*he Daily Star* is not a particularly political paper, and even *The Sun*, for all its overt political agenda, won't touch something without a strong populist angle. That both would launch "Save Doctor Who" campaigns, in other words, suggests that Doctor Who was still beloved by a wider public.

This is the position, of course, that's excluded from both Ian Levine and Michael Grade's account. Levine is so utterly obsessed with Doctor Who's cult fandom aspects that he genuinely doesn't seem to care about a mass audience. And this is why *Attack of the Cybermen*, though not even the worst story of its season, is the one that's such an easy target - it's the one that doesn't even pretend that there's a reason to watch the show other than a Whoniverse fetish. And this is what's staggeringly absent from all of Levine's defenses of the program in 1985 and 1986 - the actual defences of the program. Levine takes it almost completely for granted that Doctor Who is fantastic and wonderful, and just lays into the BBC for not appreciating its splendor. When, in truth, there are clearly a large number of people who want to like Doctor Who but who are, at the moment, failing to actually do so.

The issue here, and it's a big one, is that Doctor Who was never a cult show in the UK before 1985. It had its embarrassing fans, sure, but it was mainstream entertainment. Even in 1985 there's an

odd tension between its return to Saturdays (its supposed "proper" timeslot, and one targeted at a family audience) and its descent even further into the cult-TV rabbit hole of the Whoniverse. Even in the US - where it actually was an obscure cult show - it didn't work like a traditional piece of cult science fiction. Certainly it was never the show Ian Levine wanted it to be, and the good will of the public that had sustained it for twenty-two years had nothing to do with any of the things Ian Levine liked about the program. In this regard Levine was the exact wrong face for the public campaign to save the series simply because the series he loved wasn't one the public wanted saved. If they had, they'd have watched it. They didn't, and the ratings showed that.

And this isn't, to be clear, a swipe at fans. Clearly Doctor Who had plenty of fans in the 1980s who knew what the public loved about the series. You can tell because, well, they're writing it now and the public loves it. Ian Levine was no more representative of fandom than he was of the general public. Levine represented the fan-industrial complex, not fandom. And that position - that blindness to the quality of the show - is what set him up for the epic pratfall that was his public defense of it.

In this regard, it can't be ignored that the press campaign spearheaded by Levine was done with the explicit approval of Nathan-Turner, who, for reasons of obvious propriety, couldn't blast his bosses in the press personally. But equally, this reveals the show's "save Doctor Who" campaign for what it was - a "save John Nathan-Turner's reputation" campaign that adamantly denied that the series had gone off the rails in the first place. And what's tragic is that all of this was avoidable. It's not just Levine's failure, nor even just the production staff's - Jonathan Powell has been open about how there was no institutional will to reinvent Doctor Who.

But for that matter, its not all that clear that in late February of 1985 there was a sense in the BBC that Doctor Who needed a reinvention. Again we come back to the seeming fact that the suspension was never supposed to be that permanent. Yes, it was a vote of no confidence in the production team, but it clearly wasn't a full one or else there would have been an alternative in place. In reality it looks like budgets were tight for that year and so they took some long-running programs off the air to free up money for other things. (We'll talk about those other things in a few entries, but it's worth noting that 1985/86 was a phenomenally good period for BBC dramas.) They always intended to put the program back, and accepted, broadly speaking, that it was going to be a program they thought was crap but that other people seemed to like. It was just a program they didn't care enough about to keep on the air when they were short on cash. And in this regard, going ballistic at the BBC over it forced the BBC's hand. At that point they had to defend their actions, and between the program's low quality and the gigantic bullseye Ian Levine was painting on his back, well, the defense of the BBC's actions wasn't hard - they blamed the low quality of the series.

Which brings us to "Doctor In Distress," Ian Levine's charity single to save Doctor Who. That the song and lyrics are appallingly bad has been pointed out enough that I have no need or reason to join the pile. Less often noted, but still significant, is that the song is yet another example of too perfect a metaphor. Here are a bunch of pathetic C-list celebrities singing a terrible song about how good Doctor Who is. The result is confirmation of how bad Doctor Who is - so bad that it inspires crap like this and that people like this like it.

But there's a larger and more interesting problem. Let's, for the moment, take "Doctor In Distress" seriously, if only because nobody else ever has. Inasmuch as the song forms an argument for the series' existence, what is the argument? Let's look at the first verse: "It was a cold wet night in November 22 years ago / It was a police box in a junkyard - we didn't know where it would go / An old man took two teachers into time and space / It started off a legend that no other could replace." What is telling here is that it is the legend, it seems, that is irreplaceable, not the show itself. This is

reflected in the chorus - it is the Doctor who is in distress and whose SOS is being answered. Not the show, but the fictional character. Similarly, the lines "If we stop his travels, he'll be in a mess / The galaxy will fall to evil once more / With nightmarish monsters fighting a war" are puzzling in that they seem to suggest that the biggest danger of Doctor Who's' cancellation is that imaginary species will run riot without him.

Indeed, what is strangest about the song is that the Doctor himself is curiously absent from it. The only point where he's described is in the line "We learned to accept six Doctors with companions at their side," as if the Doctor is some imposition on his own show that gets in the way. The companions fare little better, with the line "Each screaming girl just hoped that a Yeti wouldn't shoot her" suggesting an almost total extraneousness to a show that is really about monsters. And let's be more explicit - specifically about recurring monsters. The lyrics don't focus on bits of the show that are well-remembered by the public (or else Autons and maggots would appear) but on bits that have appeared multiple times.

All of this bespeaks a larger hubris implicit in the song. It's overtly modeled on songs like "Do They Know It's Christmas" (released a few months earlier) and "We Are the World" (released a week earlier). But, well, "Do They Know It's Christmas" and "We Are The World" are about famine in Africa. There's something phenomenally, jaw-droppingly wrong about appropriating a format created to fight famine in Africa for the purposes of bitching that you have to wait eighteen months for the next episode of your favorite sci-fi show. And this blindness mirrors itself uncannily in the lyrics themselves - most obviously when the line "That police box takes him everywhere" is followed by "Oh! Bring him back!" in a way that oddly implies that the basic and expansive premise of Doctor Who - the ability of it to do anything - is antithetical to what its fans want. The song is, in the end, a monument to nothing more than fan privilege in such a distended and warped form that the very thing that it ostensibly calls for is excised. If we treat Doctor Who over Season 22 as having gone through an exorcism, "Doctor In Distress" is the horrifying moment when fandom looks at all of the putrescent material that the season exposed and shouts "Yes! That's what we love! Bring it back, don't hesitate!"

And in all of this, it's difficult not to see the fan-industrial complex, and by extension Levine, as very much to blame. Because let's face it - *The Daily Star,* if not *The Sun*, were going to pick this one up either way. *The Sun* had fought to save K-9 only five years earlier. But had that campaign not been the one we had, with offensive charity singles and photographs of angry-looking men smashing televisions, it's easy to imagine a wave of populist pressure to reinvent Doctor Who instead of preserve it. Hints of it existed at the time. Jon Pertwee, for instance, went hilariously off-message in suggesting that they bring back past Doctors for a season each. Though this would probably have been disastrous, it again gets at the fact that there were other angles to take - that people wanted Doctor Who, they just didn't want John Nathan-Turner and Eric Saward's Doctor Who. The idea that they wanted Barry Letts's again in 1985 was ludicrous, sure. But had fandom not been so blinded by the fan-industrial complex and the dishy access to their idols it granted them one can easily imagine a fan response to the suspension that was based not on "bring it back now we won't take less" but on "can we please have a worthy program again with some proper writers?"

But instead we got the John Nathan-Turner Legacy Preservation Campaign. And by the time Levine went off-message and leaked the cut in episode order for the return, an incident that seems to have been more or less where he and Nathan-Turner stopped getting on, the damage was irrevocable. Michael Grade had a convenient enemy, John Nathan-Turner had ensured his job and that he could just carry on as he had been, and we were all set for the disastrous reinvention that wasn't of Trial of a Time Lord. It would take just a year more for the show to begin its turnaround, and by 1988, as

we'll see, it got to where it was a show that the public could plausibly have embraced. But by then it was too late. Public outrage had been squandered on defending the desiccated corpse of a series left at the end of Season 22. The show was, as of April of 1985, finally completely doomed.

That's It, I've Been Renewed (*Paradise Towers*)

Unlike *Terminus*, *Paradise Towers* is a widely hated story that I unequivocally and unhesitatingly believe to be an outright work of genius. It is in many ways my pet story - the one that I'm determined to defend and see rehabilitated as, if not one of the greatest Doctor Who stories ever, at least as a solid and respectable effort and not as a legendary disaster. This is probably a doomed effort, but I continue to think that people who don't want to watch children's panto versions of J.G. Ballard are probably not very good at being Doctor Who fans.

Actually, the entirety of Season Twenty-Four is widely despised and treated as Doctor Who's nadir, which is terribly unfair, as in practice it's very visibly a season in which the show rediscovers itself and goes from not working to being extremely solid. For me *Paradise Towers* is one of the biggest leaps forward in Doctor Who. Most of the attention goes to *Remembrance of the Daleks* at the start of the next season, and while that's also a great story, it just refines what *Paradise Towers* sets up. For all its flaws, and it does have them, *Paradise Towers* also invents the future of Doctor Who, with ideas that remain relevant right up to the present day.

I'm endlessly pleased to discover there's a small cult of fellow travellers on this story who are quick to defend it as a misunderstood classic. Some day perhaps it'll come in for a proper reappraisal like *The Gunfighters* did.

And for the record, Red Kangs are best.

It's October 5th, 1987. M/A/R/R/S are at number one with "Pump Up The Volume/Antina (The First Time I See She Dance). A week later The Bee Gees unseat them with "You Win Again," Erasure, Billy Idol, Bananarama, George Michael, and Pet Shop Boys also chart. As do The Sisters of Mercy, with "This Corrosion," so, you know, welcome to the glory days of goth.

In real news, the south of England gets whacked with what is functionally a hurricane, killing 23 people and knocking out power across the region. The New York Stock Exchange jumps off a cliff to the tune of 22.61%, leading to similar fun on the London Stock Exchange. And Robert Bork is rejected from the US Supreme Court.

While on television, we have *Paradise Towers*, the supposed eigth worst Doctor Who story of all time. It is, by the way, absolutely brilliant. I say this to make clear, this is not one of my redemptive readings, that phrase implying as it does that there is something about the story requiring redemption. The only thing about this story to maybe require a spot of redemption is the acting, and we'll get there. But since everybody, when talking about this story, wants to go on about Richard Briers, let's leave the acting for as long as possible and talk about everything else first.

Because if you set the acting aside *Paradise Towers* fits very smoothly into a lengthy tradition of literature and thought about housing. If we were to sketch a quick history of this, it would go something like this. In the 1950s-70s there was a bizarre little fad in architecture called Brutalism. You know the type of building - those horrific piles of angular concrete that scream out the era of their production like the muted eyesores they are.

In practice brutalism marks the death throes of modernism. Modernism is a term that is perhaps even more devalued than postmodernism, which is an impressive feat when one stops to think about it. But for our purposes the two most important things to note about modernism is that it aggressively rejected tradition while still putting an enormous premium on notions of form and structure. This caused it to eventually fall awkwardly between both the right and the left. The right hated it because it

was too non-traditional and because Hitler hated painters who were better than him, which is to say, virtually everybody. The left, on the other hand, noticed that an alarming number of modernists turned into fascists who were, after all, equally fond of throwing out the established order of things and replacing it with a rigidly designed new system.

After World War II, however, modernism broke out in architecture in a big way. The post-war fascination with technocracy and the sudden availability of lots of modernist architects who had fled the Nazis meant that everybody wanted to do big urban renewal projects with grand designs and visions. Hence the rise of brutalism. The archetypal product of this were what in the US are usually called housing projects (as in "living in the projects") and in the UK are council estates (as in the backronym of chav as "council housed and violent"). That is to say, government-subsidized affordable housing.

In the brutalist style this turned out to be a disaster. The standard example is Pruitt-Igoe, a shoddily constructed block of housing that quickly degenerated into a crime-ridden nightmare and was demolished less than twenty years after its construction. The two extremes of this form a clear snapshot of this sort of modernism. On the one hand, Pruitt-Igoe was an unmitigated disaster of a construction. On the other, it was built by respected architects and was an acclaimed piece of architecture. The contrast led to the ironically derogatory phrase "award-winning design" to refer to something beloved by architectural critics and thus, by implication, almost certainly a piece of crap in practice.

For those who have been following the blog for a while, you may recall that we briefly dealt with J.G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* back in the Pertwee era. Ballard, in his time, was one of the more scathing critics of this sort of modernism, and indeed, one of his better books was his 1975 novel *High Rise*, about a modernist apartment block falling into a raging internal civil war. This sort of thing was very much in vogue in the 1970s - a criticism of the technocratic structures that underlay modernism and of the fetishistic worship of spectacle that they entailed. This was a major theme of the early Pertwee era, with its initial anxieties over technocratic structures giving way to an embrace of glam. After which Ballard and his ilk kind of fell out of fashion.

But in the 1980s, under Thatcher, this line of thought experienced a revival as, under Thatcher, urban renewal became chic again, this time in the name of redevelopment for major corporate clients. In the UK the major example is the London Docklands, which went from a working class area of London to a herd of glass and steel white elephants. (Now we're well into East London Redevelopment Act II: Olympic Boogaloo) Like the first wave of modernist redevelopment this was based on the idea of "fixing" the bad areas of the city. Unlike the first wave, instead of fixing them by providing decent housing for the people who lived there, this wave sought to price them out and get them to move somewhere - anywhere else.

This led to the rise of a second wave of concern about modernism and its effects on ordinary people. But this second wave had some interestingly different concerns. Where the first wave had mostly been critical of the way in which totalitarian modernist visions crushed individuals and led to depraved social conditions, the second wave was interested in finding an alternative to the totalitarianism. The alternative of choice has generally been community-based strategies, in which local community groups band together to produce their own cooperative solutions to their problems, developing functional structures around their behavior instead of imposing them from above. Much of the sharpest opposition to austerity programs in the UK has come from these perspectives - ones that heavily inform the political thought of Rowan Williams as well, and, for that matter, of Barack Obama, whose role as a community organizer basically meant "doing this stuff."

This second wave is, indirectly, a big influence on this blog. One of the people to come out of the late 80s critique of modernism was Iain Sinclair, a brilliantly obscurantist chronicler of the material East London who, in turn, became a mid-career inspiration for Alan Moore, whose work has increasingly combined Sinclair's psychogeography with Moore's fascination with Ideaspace, tracking the imaginary geographies of things - an idea that led directly to my discarding the physical geography entirely and taking an idle stroll across an entirely imaginary landscape of memory. And Moore's more recent work - particularly his tragically aborted underground magazine *Dodgem Logic* - has focused very explicitly on the failing council houses of his native Northampton and the practical lives of the impoverished in his own community.

Paradise Towers fits completely in this tradition. Kroagnan, the Great Architect who despised how people ruined his perfect designs, is a straightforward parodic critique of the modernist architect. The devolution of Paradise Towers from beautiful planned community to urban warzone is right out of Ballard. The equivalence between Kroagnan and zombies is a flat-out lift from Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* and its mall setting. *Paradise Towers*, through and through, is a contribution to this tradition of thought.

Tat Wood, in *About Time*, notes that it is the first story in some time to have no references to previous stories. This is a telling detail that explains at least part of why the story is unloved. The fact of the matter is that Doctor Who has, for several years now, been catering primarily to an audience of fans. Fandom is an exceedingly middle class practice, based as it is on a surplus of leisure time and the disposable income to fritter away on Dapol action figures, Target novelizations, trips to conventions, and other such commercial product. This fact is largely responsible for the maddening sociopathy of mainstream science fiction fandom - it's a self-selected group of reasonably affluent people focused on capitalist production. They are myopic by design.

A story about modernism and council estates is, in other words, utterly removed from anything that a fan in the Ian Levine model would ever care about. And to be frank, large numbers of people who talk about Paradise Towers simply don't seem remotely aware the larger literary tradition it fits into. They treat it as a naff runaround with silly concepts. And this inevitably makes it look like a much, much weaker story than it is. Which is fine - Tat Wood's observation of the way in which it breaks from past stories by not catering to fans is telling. This isn't a Doctor Who story for Doctor Who fans. It's a Doctor Who story for the British public - an attempt to think of Doctor Who as an alternative to *Coronation Street* (which, of course, it was in the McCoy era - directly so).

To put it another way, *Paradise Towers* marks a return to a very old conception of what Doctor Who is based on the bygone utopian models of what the BBC is. It's a story that is simultaneously tackling issues of concern to working class segments of society and framing them in terms of a larger and highbrow philosophical debate - something, in other words, that has something to say to large swaths of British society and that, more importantly, speaks to them as part of a unified whole. This used to be what the BBC was about and what it was for. This used to be what Doctor Who was for. About the only people really excluded from the audience to whom *Paradise Towers* attempts to be relevant are sad sack anoraks. Unfortunately, they were the only audience left, but that's neither here nor there.

There is, however, a pesky set of grounds for criticism. This is ostensibly trying to go for Ballard-esque *2000 AD*-inflected dystopias of street gangs and cannibal old women running around a council estate. Unfortunately, it looks like a children's panto. This is somewhat dissonant, in much the same way that that claim is somewhat understated. But most of the criticisms of it miss the point. The usual line of critique is that Richard Briers as the Chief Caretaker overacts. Which, yes, he does.

The thing is, everyone overacts. It's one thing when there's one jarring note in the acting that skews a production. But here the entirety of the acting is skewed in the same direction. The Kangs are too old to be a child street gang and don't so much act like a street gang as like a childish approximation thereof. The Rezzies are over the top. Pex is a completely inadequate parody of an action hero. And yes, Richard Briers is channeling his inner John Cleese in portraying a fascist authoritarian.

But look at that list - everything is pushed towards a broad and theatrical sort of children's television. *Paradise Towers* isn't a Ballardian dystopia screwed up by bad acting. It's a Ballardian dystopia performed as broad-stroked children's television. It is, in other words, a completely consistent genre fusion in which one of the genres is postmodernist social commentary and the other is low-rent children's television.

Of course, fusing two flavors together is not an inherently good idea. But in this case there's a pleasant logic to it. Both children's television and Ballard have a strong commitment to a sort of wild excess. They are considerably closer than they might appear. The only reason to fault this, in other words, is if you really think that the discussions of anal sadism are the whole point of *The Atrocity Exhibition*. If, on the other hand, what you favor is its inventiveness and its sense of manic glee, Paradise Towers will be right up your alley.

And more to the point, *Paradise Towers* is a theft of what is, in 1987, a twelve year old book. It's not like High Rise is brand spanking new and innovative anymore. A piece that just wallows gleefully in the sick and twisted nature of *Paradise Towers* is going to be little more than *Vengeance on Varos* without as much self-awareness. On top of that, it was never going to work on Doctor Who, both because the BBC was never going to let outright Ballard go out under the Doctor Who banner, even in a later timeslot, and because Doctor Who was never going to be able to afford it anyway.

Whereas Doctor Who can nail low-rent children's television in its sleep. And children's television Ballard carries all of the frisson that Ballard could cause in the 1970s. The dissonance between the story's apparent mood and its actual content is substantive. Ballard was always trading on the tradition of the grotesque, which the overacting is still perfectly compatible with. The tension between what the show is about and how it's being performed is tangible - which is to say that all of the grotesqueries are more noticeable through their absence than they ever could be through presence in 1987.

There's also a pleasant charm to be had in the compatibility of the underlying messages. On the one hand the ending is a mawkish festival of "but we need to put aside our differences and work together." On the other hand this is exactly how social alliances for the purposes of community organization work - people come together on the basis of shared goals like improving their living areas or not being murdered by evil cleaning robots. Yes, there's the vague threat of bathos that risks making the serious and important point about what effective action in the face of totalitarianism is look like cheap sentimentality, but it's a relatively minor risk. For the most part it comes off.

The easiest way to put this is that *Paradise Towers* gets away with being Ballard for kids. But this undersells what it accomplishes. It's not just kid-friendly Ballard, it's a new take on what Ballard is doing. The introduction of children's television isn't just a shift in audience, it's a materially new perspective on the concepts that deserves to be taken seriously on its own merits and terms.

In the end, to criticize *Paradise Towers* we have to suggest that children's television adaptations of Ballard that are about the failures of modernism is a bad thing. We can certainly make that case if we want to, but frankly, if that's not something you're interested in it's not entirely clear why you're watching Doctor Who in the first place. Stories like this are why I blog.

Is *Paradise Towers* flawless? God no. Everything it does well will be done better in at least one of the next ten stories. But more importantly, nothing it does well has been done in Doctor Who for years at this point, if it's ever been done at all. It's at once a clear return to the actual legacy of what Doctor Who used to be - its purpose, as opposed to its iconography - and a genuinely new take that's bang on target for the year its airing in.

This is, in other words, it. The moment where Doctor Who turned it around. We're now in an eleven story run where quality is the norm and disasters are an aberration, and, at a minimum, a ten year run in which Doctor Who is consistently good with regular outbreaks of genius. We're finally at a point where the show is not only brilliant again, but one where the trajectory from here to the present day is, save for one brief but calamitous downturn in the mid-90s, one of almost constant improvement.

Welcome back.

Take Hitler and Put Him in the Cupboard Over There (*The Curse of Fenric*)

I make no pretence of being impartial on *TARDIS Eruditorum*, and my bias towards the Sylvester McCoy era is probably the most blatant example of that. I'm shamelessly in the tank for it, and *The Curse of Fenric* is, along with *Power of the Daleks*, a contender for my favorite story of all time. It was the first piece of classic series Doctor Who I showed to my wife, and along with *Remembrance of the Daleks* is one of two pieces I've seen most.

In hindsight my wife may like it slightly less, as it's one of the posts that caused me to basically disappear for a day writing obsessively. But posts like this are the basic pleasure of *TARDIS Eruditorum* - chances to disappear for a bit down a rabbit hole. It occasionally becomes a bit of a competition with myself to see how diverse and far-flung a set of topics I can squeeze into a post. By that measure, at least, *The Curse of Fenric* is practically cheating.

The only complaint I have about the story is that whenever I'm at a wedding and the bit from *1 Corinthians* that the story uses comes up I'm inevitably disappointed when there's not an attack of underwater vampires. But this is probably just because I'm bored a lot at weddings.

It's October 25th, 1989. Jive Bunny and the Mastermixers are at number one with "That's What I Like," which is unseated after two weeks by Lisa Stansfield's "All Around the World," which rides out the story. Phil Collins, Belinda Carlisle, Kylie Minogue, and New Kids on the Block also chart. This being rather dismal, let's note that Kate Bush's The Sensual World comes out during this story, which is an altogether more fitting analogy.

In real news, Nicaragua ends its ceasefire with the US-backed contras, and Douglas Wilder and David Dinkins become the first African-American governor in the US and mayor of New York City, respectively. The General Assembly of the Church of England votes to allow the ordination of women. Increasingly desperate measures are taken to deal with an ambulance strike in Britain. And oh yeah, the Berlin Wall falls.

While on television we get *The Curse of Fenric*, which is one of the best things ever. It is also, of course, oddly incoherent. The biggest howler by its own logic is pointed out by Tat Wood. Much of the plot hinges on the fact that everyone at the base is a descendent of the viking settlers. These would be, of course, the viking settlers who were all killed by vampires, according to the inscriptions. Oops. And yet I've watched *The Curse of Fenric* more than any other Doctor Who story, and I never noticed this problem. I'll bet that an overwhelming majority of you haven't either. And this is an important observation that provides a lot of insight into how we have to understand *The Curse of Fenric*.

Rather more of you, I suspect, have noticed things like the fact that the chess puzzle and its solution are completely non-sensical, that a mate-in-one puzzle that stumps an ancient god for ages is ridiculous, that nordic runes are a strange way to make a logic diagram, that no understanding whatsoever of how to crack a German code would also be able to translate a language, and that the inscription does not, in fact, read "let the chains of Fenric shatter" but instead reads "Leek, Abracadabra, Presto Chango, Leek." (OK, possibly only my good friend Anna noticed that last one. Incidentally, there's a big line of commentary I'm just dropping here about the Norse mythological roots of this story in favor of a guest post from her later.)

It may seem strange to harp on the plot holes of this story, given that I don't usually do that. After all, it's not like the understanding of Norse runes in this story is actually any weirder than the series'

understanding of physics in many other stories. But there is something subtly different about the distortions here. For one thing, this starts to tack towards playing fast and loose with history, something Doctor Who has, of course, never ever done in any way shape or form. But more broadly, *The Curse of Fenric* relies on distorted versions of things that are understood, as opposed to impossible (or at the very least colossally improbable) versions of things that are not yet understood. There is, in other words, something fundamentally different about creating a wonky version of chess than creating a wonky version of faster than light travel.

All of which is a long way of saying that *The Curse of Fenric* continues *Ghost Light*'s approach of allowing the story's logic to be associative rather than strictly causal. But whereas *Ghost Light* invites a compulsive, scurrying picking through of its themes and links, *The Curse of Fenric* lurches forward with mad, claustrophobic adrenaline. Tat Wood chalks it up to the wartime setting, and it's true that this helps, but there's so much more to it than that. It's also the return to a straightforward horror film setup, and the willingness to just linger in extended sequences of unbridled frights. And, perhaps most importantly, it's the way in which the story starts in Act III.

This is something the McCoy era has played with before. *Remembrance of the Daleks* was effectively an Act III to an unscreened Act I and a half-remembered dream of *An Unearthly Child* as Act II. *Greatest Show in the Galaxy* played at starting at the end, but didn't quite make the concept hold together. *Battlefield* was Act III to a story whose first acts were yet to come. But here in *The Curse of Fenric* we finally get the unadulterated version. *Fenric* is the final part of a story that has skipped the beginning and instead gone straight for the climax. And so everything spirals up to massive, apocalyptic proportions at a dizzying rate.

The mistake that it's easy to make is to think that because the story is driven forward at such an unrelenting pace that it's the least bit facile in what's going on behind the scenes. This isn't something like *24* that holds together an absurd penny dreadful with the unceasing suspense of a ticking clock. Or, if we want to stick to Doctor Who terms, it's not *Earthshock*, where the sole point of the exercise is the adrenaline of the plot being pounded out. No, the urgent, demanding rhythm of the plot is just that - a rhythm over which the story is playing. Yes, the rhythm smoothes the transitions among the story's many ideas, but it's still the ideas and their interplay that are important here.

The result is what is, in my experience, the single easiest piece of classic series Doctor Who to show someone who has never seen it before. And for my money, with good reason, because I think this really may be the classic series' finest hour. It doesn't require any excuses beyond those allowed to it by being from 1989 (indeed, the transmitted version, with its use of voiced-over dialogue combined with scenes of things happening and unfolding, largely comes off as ahead of its time), it moves at a great clip, and it's very, very smart. And it's the sort of thing only Doctor Who can do: underwater World War II vampires demonically possessing Alan Turing. If that isn't your idea of how to spend two hours of your life, quite frankly, you're just in the wrong fandom.

As with *Ghost Light* before it, everything in this story is curled into a tight thematic knot. The story goes back to World War II, the main event of the twentieth century, and revisits the same tangle of evolutionary and historical progress that animated *Ghost Light*. Here, though, this is a more compacted strand. Where *Ghost Light* meticulously flayed this issue and sought to explore its depths, *The Curse of Fenric* takes one vary interesting perspective on it and begins combining it with new themes. (This is another reason why, to my mind, *Fenric* is better served in its transmitted position. Having explored the theme in *Ghost Light*, *Fenric* builds on it. Whereas positioning *Ghost Light* after *Fenric* makes its exploration into a footnote to *The Curse of Fenric*, as opposed to a triumphant lead-in.) In this case, the clever idea is that *The Curse of Fenric* accepts the idea of historical

teleology, but then suggests that the end product might be monstrous. It presents us with an end point of the world that is a toxic wasteland populated by fish vampires, and says "this is what the world will become in the end."

Similarly, the historical end everyone in the story is obsessed with is Ragnarok. Which, not to tread on Anna's feet too hard (if only because she has fabulous taste in shoes), is significant. The Norse worldview does, at least in most popular conceptions, move inevitably towards a bleak and apocalyptic end. In Freudian terms - terms which apply well to the bulk of this story - we're talking about the death drive. *The Curse of Fenric* posits a self-destructive, suicidal instinct within history and biology itself.

In this approach Fenric becomes the literal embodiment of this - a quasi-physical manifestation of the death drive itself. He is, after all, a force intertwined entirely with history - existent since the dawn of time, and slowly, invisibly guiding events. And, of course, the Doctor gets cast in the oppositional role, struggling to remove Fenric from human history.

But if we take this Freudian approach we run into an interesting problem. Inasmuch as there's a counterpart to the death drive it's the sex drive. And this story is very big on dualism, even if it does eventually implode its dualisms with giddy aplomb. It's telling that the "good" force that primordially opposes Fenric is never accounted for after its seeming destruction, with the Doctor slotting into the opposition role. So if we read Fenric as the death drive it becomes very difficult not to shift the weight of the sex drive onto the Doctor.

In contrast to almost everything that has come before, however, the story doesn't try to resist this. Indeed, it seems mostly content to have the Doctor be linked to sexuality. It just displaces it slightly onto Ace. Ace is not, however, the Doctor's proxy or double in this story. Instead she gets positioned as the subject that the Doctor and Fenric are both fighting over. (This risks making her into a passive object to be fought over by men, but largely avoids it given the extent to which both the Doctor and Fenric are historical processes in this story, and thus the extent to which it is less a battle for Ace herself and more a battle of which drive will dominate in her self-identity.) So on the one hand Fenric is trying to get her to help him bring about Ragnarok, while on the other the Doctor is trying to get her head straightened out so that she can dive into the water, an action that is symbolically linked to sexuality. (The sexuality, of course, remains largely symbolic, framed, as ever, in the trappings of children's television. I'd go on a defense of the slightly stilted Ace seduction scene, but anyone who's been reading knows how I'll defend it, so let's just note that Ace's tacit equation of her children's show time traveling with sexuality is absolutely brilliant.)

We could stop here. A Freudian vampire story about historical progress that positions sexual liberation as the solution to war would be sufficient to rank this story among the classics. But astonishingly, it goes further. Because on top of all of this the story is hugely invested in the question of language and encryption. This is a complex nexus - in many ways to this story what evolution and history are to Ghost Light - so let's just accept that we're going to rack up the word count here and take our time.

At the most basic level it's clear that *The Curse of Fenric* is playing with images of logic and computing. These are among the standard issue set of Cold War anxieties, and we've been seeing them in the program for years now. The crux of it is that the Cold War is based on a ruthless, pragmatic calculation by both sides, and thus is utterly intractable. With nuclear weapons being inexorably linked to computers (hence the classic anxiety of the hacker who gains control of the nuclear weapons) the idea of how computers would wage war against each other and what the consequences of a computer going wrong would be were standard Cold War anxieties, and the use of

chess and of computers playing chess is similarly straightforward, as is all of Millington's "think like the enemy" rhetoric. (Of all things its Destiny of the Daleks that provides the most obvious antecedent for *The Curse of Fenric*.) Like *Battlefield* two stories earlier and *Survival* after it, *The Curse of Fenric* is the series' last play at the Cold War.

But what's interesting about *The Curse of Fenric* is that the Cold War is displaced slightly within it. It takes place in World War II, when the Russians and the British were still allies. And yet everyone is aware of the Cold War and aware that it looms inevitably over them. This is a clever inversion of the Cold War/computing link - if the Cold War is a consequence of logic then it must be a historical inevitability that could be predicted and foreseen. So the Cold War's logic gets allied with the death drive and Fenric as the future continually haunts the past, threatening to happen.

The key line in all of this is Millington's musing on the idea of thinking machines and his wondering whose thoughts they'll think. What's significant is not merely the Cold War future that the Ultima machine augers, it's the fact that this future is conceived of as a train of thought. This ties in neatly with what computers were actually being developed in World War II for, namely the process of deciphering German codes. The purpose of computers, in other words, is to understand speech and language - to allow us access to the thoughts of another.

But the thoughts of another are, in *The Curse of Fenric*, dangerous, both for the undercurrents they carry and for the possibility of for their own totalizing nature. Hence the strange parallels between the Viking inscriptions and the Russian documents - because somewhere in the words and language themselves there's this unknowable thing lurking, dragging everyone towards a monstrous teleology.

(At this point, if only for a handful of my readers, I need to mention Lacan. One of the most obvious grad school papers about Doctor Who would be a Lacanian analysis of this story. If you play the digital media aspects up enough it's probably even publishable. Having now appeased the academic wonks, we return to our regularly scheduled post.)

Central to all of this is Doctor Judson, the story's stand-in for Alan Turing. It's become so standard these days to praise Turing and to tut mournfully about his (genuinely appalling) post-war treatment by the British government and his (genuinely tragic) suicide. With the novelization even getting around to implying a homosexual past between Judson and Millington, the link becomes even clearer. Turing, of course, is famous for suggesting that being able to convince a person that you are also a person is sufficient to demonstrate that you are thinking. And so the idea of a line of thought that extends out of computers and dooms humanity to Ragnarok, and of computers having an intimate connection with language is a straightforward transformation of the standard Alan Turing package.

Except for two little things that nobody ever covers in the standard primer on Alan Turing. First, you are almost certainly wrong about what the Turing Test is. Second, you've probably never heard of the halting problem, which is really unfortunate. We'll start there.

For metaphoric purposes, the halting problem should be thought of as another variation of Godel's Incompleteness Theorem and the Uncertainty Principle. All three are cases in which it turns out that there are fundamental and absolute limits on knowledge. Godel's Incompleteness Theorem shows that there are statements in mathematics that cannot be proven true or false, and, more importantly, that it's impossible to identify these statements, thus putting an absolute limit on mathematical certainty. Heisenberg shows that there is a level at which our ability to have knowledge of the physical universe hits an absolute limit. But Turing does something altogether creepier - he indicates that thought itself may have an absolute limit.

One of Turing's biggest ideas - one that's usually treated as something akin to a value-added

extra on the standard Turing package - is the idea of the Turing Machine. On a simple level, the Turing Machine is a theoretical model for a computer - that is, a way of processing data that one can use to create algorithms that solve problems. What's interesting about a Turing Machine is not actually its design, but the fact that to date nobody has found a design for a computer that can do anything that a Turing Machine can't. Plenty that can do things more efficiently, but nothing that can actually solve a problem that a Turing Machine can't solve.

The big question this implies, of course, is whether the human brain is just a fancy and efficient Turing Machine. The answer is… we have no idea. Certainly there are things humans can do that computers can't, but since we don't understand the particulars of how the brain works we can't tell if this is because we haven't figured out how to design an algorithm to do these things or because the brain can do things computers can't. But inasmuch as we understand problem solving the Turing Machine is as good as it gets.

OK - so the Turing Machine is a theoretical computer. Now I want you to imagine a specific instance of a Turing Machine, which we call a Universal Turing Machine. Basically, what a Universal Turing Machine can do is accept a program written for another Turing Machine as input and perform calculations on the machine. In other words, it's a Turing Machine that can run programs about Turing Machines. Now, one of the most basic questions you can ask about a Turing Machine program is whether it's ever going to stop on its own. Some programs, after all, don't - the classic schoolboy BASIC program of "10 PRINT "BUTTS" 20 GOTO 10," for instance, does not halt. Whereas a program that takes two numbers, adds them together, and returns the answer does halt.

The halting problem, simply put, asks whether a given program and a given input is ever going to halt on its own or not. In other words, it asks whether it is possible to determine if a given problem has a definite solution or not, at least in terms of Turing Machines. And one of the absolute biggest things that Turing ever did, and something that's routinely left out of the standard package, was to show that there is no general solution for the halting problem that can be encoded on a Turing Machine. That is, you cannot build a Turing Machine that can look at another Turing Machine and tell if it's going to halt or not.

Given the continual difficulty of establishing that there is any type of computer more capable than a Turing Machine, this is an absolutely mammoth result in that it suggests a fundamental level of uncertainty to thought in the general case. The only way out, of course, is whether or not it is possible to construct something more powerful than a Turing Machine. Which brings us to another giant part of Turing's thought, the Turing Test. Which, as I said, you are probably wrong about.

See, you probably think that the Turing Test involves some form of sitting someone down with an IM window and seeing if they can tell whether the person they're talking to is a human or a computer. Perhaps they face their interlocutor one-on-one, perhaps they face both a human and a computer and have to identify which one is which, but in any case, the idea is that if a computer can fool a person into thinking that they are talking to a non-computer then the computer can think. (And, implicitly, albeit not mathematically, that the human brain is just another Turing Machine)

This is not true. In fact the Turing Test, as proposed by Turing, starts with what Turing calls the imitation game. In the imitation game, a man and a woman both exchange IMs with someone, and the person they are talking to tries to figure out which one is the man and which one is the woman, with, obviously, the man trying to fool the questioner. The Turing Test as proposed by Turing says that if a computer can do as well as a human male at fooling the questioner then the computer can be said to think. This is, first of all, a considerably harder standard - especially given that the popular misunderstanding of the Turing Test, where a computer can fool someone into thinking they're any sort

of person at all, hasn't been passed yet.

But second and more interestingly, it moves the bar from a bland "thinking is as thinking does" standard to suggesting that thought is based on the ability to imitate. Aside from having a clear-cut (and I would argue, for Turing, intentional) connection to Aristotle, this version of the test defines thinking not as the ability to put up a facade but as the ability to successfully imagine the thoughts of another person and to think them.

Getting back, at long last, to *The Curse of Fenric*, what's interesting about this is that Briggs's script, for all its wonky understandings of major concepts, actually has a very good understanding of the real Turing. Millington's line about whose thoughts the computers will think is a wonderful gesture in this direction. Because, of course, thinking other people's thoughts is the very definition of a thinking computer.

But what's more important is that while Judson represents the standard image of Turing, the Doctor gets to represent the real image of Turing. The Doctor's perpetual championing of an unfixed universe in which it is impossible to know everything is easily read as an embrace of the consequences of the halting problem, while McCoy's endless tricks and traps, creating situations that imitate one thing but are in fact another shows that he understands the real nature of thought. It is not merely enough to, as Judson's Ultima machine does, read and understand language/systems/stories. It is also necessary to be able to play with them and subvert them through imitation. Real thought is mercury.

But the Doctor also embraces the undercurrent of the Turing Test. It is impossible not to read Turing's fascination with gender impersonation as a facet of his own sexuality. In essence (and allowing for some bleeding of homosexuality and transgenderism that is not inappropriate for 1950's limited understanding or room for expression of either concept), Turing suggests that the definition of thought is the ability to live in the closet. And so in the larger system that *The Curse of Fenric* offers, the act of thought is equivalent to the liberation of sexuality from the tyranny of cold logic's death drive.

And so these ideas build towards something that Doctor Who had not really done since the days of Ian and Barbara - a story in which the resolution depends entirely on the interiority of the companion. The Doctor sets up what appears to be a flawless execution of the mythic final battle that is a central part of the death drive's obsession with Ragnarok. ("He pulled bones from the desert sands and carved them into chess pieces" being the most brazen lapsing of the story's events into the straightforwardly and unclutteredly mythic.) But in reality it's not the mythic death drive, but a plot to get Ace to work through her own angst. The real purpose of the exercise was to free Ace from Fenric's influence - to psychoanalyze her and use the breaking of her faith in the Doctor as a catharsis to liberate her sexuality.

And so we suddenly make a seamless transition from the rhapsodic epic register of the final battle between good and evil to a scene about Ace's angst. The sequence of the Doctor breaking Ace's faith is one of the best in the classic series - hence it getting recycled wholesale by Toby Whithouse for *The God Complex*. And for the first time the series pulls off this switch perfectly. It's an absolutely brutal sequence. Briggs, McCoy, Aldred, and, credit due, Nicholas Mallett outdo themselves, getting the impact of Ace's agony and the Doctor's own guilt at having to do it to be as strong as the mythic buildup. And this is no mean feat, given that the incessant tension of the mythic buildup has been the driving engine of the story, and so has been done incredibly well. But they pull it off, and the story, at its climactic moment, seemingly effortlessly goes from ancient myth to a young woman's psyche, the whole arc of history and evolution, the very nature of the soul and of human

reason, and the final battle between good and evil suddenly turning out to be perfectly encapsulated by a girl learning to forgive her mother.

It is, for my money, the point in the McCoy era where the program not only steps out of the shadow of the early 80s but steps out of the shadow of the Hinchcliffe era and of Robert Holmes. *The Curse of Fenric* is unabashedly a Holmesian epic. It delivers the promise of alchemy being rooted in the realm of the material perfectly. And it does it while delivering a spruced up and more muscular version of the Hinchcliffe era's standard trick of doing an intimate sequel to an untold epic. But where the Hinchcliffe era did this because it was a way to get at the epic without having to break the budget, here we have a story that's doing a sequel to an epic that is unabashedly epic in its own scope, with armies of vampires unleashed in the middle of World War II. It's an intimate sequel to an untold epic that nevertheless sounds bigger and more fun than the original story.

And it is, for my money, the best story of the classic series. A piece of truly epic mercury that dances dizzyingly through as many ideas as *Ghost Light* before ending in a piece of moving character drama, all without missing a beat. Never mind the best story of the classic series, this is flat out one of the greatest pieces of television ever.

Before Light and Time and Space and Matter (*White Darkness*)

As I've advanced further and further into the blog it's been satisfying to revisit the concerns of earlier entries in later stories. *White Darkness*, despite being only OK as a novel, was earmarked almost as soon as I wrote the Mary Whitehouse post as one where I'd revisit the theme of bullying from within Doctor Who's "present" at the time it happened.

It's always interesting to watch a long-standing plan like that crash into the reality of the text, but *White Darkness* provided one of those instances where it works better than I could have imagined. The themes of the book and the larger sweep of the wilderness years managed to entwine with the stuff I wanted to bring to the story perfectly, and in a way that my more autobiographical stuff doesn't always.

For me the point of *TARDIS Eruditorum* isn't just to tell the history of Doctor Who, but the history of Doctor Who within the world. I feel like this entry hits that balance, if not better than most, at least more interestingly than many.

It's June of 1993. Ace of Base are at number one with "All That She Wants," unseated a week later by UB40 with "(I Can't Help) Falling In Love With You," which lasts for two weeks before Gabrielle takes over with "Dreams," making this the first actually volatile month on the charts I feel like we've had in a while. The Spin Doctors, Janet Jackson, Tina Turner, Rod Stewart, The Pet Shop Boys, and Haddaway also chart, the latter with "What Is Love," AKA that song from the Saturday Night Live sketch.

While in the news, Andrew Wiles proes Fermat's Last Theorem. Loreena Bobbitt does the thing that she's famous for. Clinton orders some casual bombing of Iraq. Kim Campbell becomes the first female Prime Minster of Canada.

While in books, it's *White Darkness*. And thus an intersection with my life again. June of 1993 is the summer before sixth grade for me. I was, by this point, a Doctor Who fan, and it's in sixth grade that I discovered the New Adventures. It started with finding one or two in a book store - probably either the still-open Barnes and Noble in Danbury, Connecticut or the now-closed Borders in Farmington. I know the first two books I got were *White Darkness* and *Lucifer Rising*.

Memory deceives just a little bit here. I don't remember exactly what month - it was certainly a bit later than June. I can't quite place exactly when my relationship with Doctor Who snapped into the present such that there was such a thing as a new release. I started buying issues of *Doctor Who Magazine* when I saw them in the comic shop in this period, but my comic-buying days were nearing an end this year - I bailed out of them completely in the fall of 1994. So there was definitely a point around here where I became aware of the fact that new Doctor Who was coming out on a fairly set schedule, and that there was such a thing as a community responding to it. I know this must have happened somewhere in the very beginning of the school year, because I remember looking forward to the release of Blood Heat. My best guess is that it happened between *Birthright* and *Iceberg*, right as the school year began.

Of the two books, however, *White Darkness* is the more memorable one. It's the one I definitely think of as the first New Adventure I got. It's also the one I alluded to back in the Mary Whitehouse entry - the one that got torn in half and shoved into my desk. I don't think I ever nailed down who did that one. The other one of my NAs to get vandalized, *Tragedy Day*, I remember better - that one I rescued from being kicked around the hall. I remember vividly their excuse, that they didn't know the

book was mine, and sputtering bewilderedly as the school authorities mostly took this as a reason to treat the incident more lightly. As though, you know, playing kickabout with a book is OK so long as you don't know whose it is. As though the people bullying me for being the weirdo who liked this "Doctor Who" thing they'd never heard would be unaware of whose Doctor Who book they were kicking.

It's strange to go back over this period and see the parallelism. I always figured I was unusual in my 1990s Doctor Who fandom. But the age-old lesson of the Hinchcliffe era bears mention. History repeats itself. Structures recur. So my outsider, bullied era of Doctor Who is the era where Doctor Who seemed most openly embarrassed about the fact that it was Doctor Who. When the series itself seemed happy to sit in the back of the classroom hoping nobody would notice it - it's just an innocuous little book series now! You don't have to be angry about it taking up part of your license fee to pander to anoraks anymore!

What's funny is how few of the New Adventures I actually read. At a guess, despite owning the full line, I actually finished… sixteen during the era in question. *White Darkness* was not among them. It's tempting to try to blame this on it getting stolen and torn in half, but I replaced it, and given how many others I failed to finish it seems dishonest to pretend that I'd have finished it. The reasons for this are complex and idiosyncratic. They come down to the fact that I have mild ADD and am actually a mediocre reader of prose. I get irritated and skim. The lengthy sections of the New Adventures in which the Doctor doesn't appear are difficult for me to focus on today. This is purely a flaw in me, and not the novels. But it meant that it was easy for me to lose the plot, and then equally easy for me to get bored and move to something else in my reading. (These days I actually switch between the book and the DWRG summaries, because knowing the plot of what I'm reading helps compensate for my tendency to accidentally just sort of rub my eyes over a five page section without actually reading it.)

For years I assumed the problem was that the New Adventures were just a bit too adult for an eleven-year-old. And there are ones that are - I was never going to appreciate *Warhead* at eleven. Or even the Paul Cornell books, though I did actually finish both *Love and War* and *Timewyrm: Revelation* (albeit with little clue what the hell was going on in either by the end). But returning to the books two decades later has forced me to admit that, actually, the problem really was me a lot of the time. *White Darkness* is a prime example - I had no idea at the time, but it's actually an effective bit of relatively taut, economic prose in Terrance Dicks style.

Of course, there are other complexities. An American eleven-year-old is unlikely to have the worldview necessary to parse a novel that is in part about the relationship between Doctor Who and imperialism, and in another part about H.P. Lovecraft. Having never heard of either Lovecraft or imperialism at the time this was fairly clearly not going to be the book for me no matter how I paid attention.

Let's start with the Lovecraft, since that's the closest to some things we've been kicking around the blog for a while now. We've been talking for a week or so now about the transition in the 1990s towards a nonspecific and general paranoia and away from a paranoia of specifics. There are few writers more suited to this than Lovecraft. As I've stated before, the central premise of Lovecraft - the major horror he offers - is the prospect of an unknowable and unspeakable horror that underlies the world. ("The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far.") The Lovecraftian idea of horror, in which the universe itself is what is hostile as opposed to any definable object within it - is perfectly suited to the

nineties. And though it is easy to confuse my own learning of the existence of Lovecraft in the 1990s with the general case of a nineties Lovecraft fad, the New Adventures, at least, suggest that there was an interest in Lovecraft.

There are two books where we'll deal heavily with Lovecraft, and the other one is so dreadfully problematic that it largely eclipses this one. Because while McIntee gets a lot of credit for importing Lovecraft to Doctor Who, what's striking about *White Darkness* is how understated he is about it. He never goes so far as to name the Great Old One in this book, allowing it to be a lurking and unmentionable horror. This isn't Doctor Who/Lovecraft crossover fanfic, at least not in a conventional sense.

Indeed, there's a larger issue in play with McIntee's handling of Lovecraft, which is that the book is set in Haiti and is based on the local vodou religion, particularly the myth of zombi(e)s. Vodou, more often spelled voodoo in the popular culture spelling, where it tends to be an all-purpose synonym for black magic. But McIntee makes a real effort to take it seriously on its own terms, following particularly from the controversial work of Wade Davis, who offered a pharmacological explanation for Haitian zombie myths. This is all wrapped up in a historically-minded story about the 1915 military coup in Haiti and resultant US occupation of it.

There's a significant statement involved in doing a Lovecraft-inspired story that takes Haitian history and culture seriously. On the one hand it's exactly the sort of thing Lovecraft would do, in that his horror was largely obsessed with the prospect of obscure cults in "primitive" societies dedicated to the worship of terrible ancient gods. On the other hand, Lovecraft mostly did this because he was a completely racist dickbag. The idea of a Lovecraft story that actually treats a predominately black culture seriously and with respect is a very clever bit of work that involves turning Lovecraft's approach against itself and actively repairing and redeeming the text.

But there's a real extent to which this describes what *White Darkness* is doing more broadly for Doctor Who. It's telling that the novel begins not just with the Doctor finally ditching that dreadful question mark pullover in favor of a new wardrobe, but with him finding the pendant given to him by Cameca way back in *The Aztecs*. *The Aztecs* is an interesting story to refer back to, generally speaking. On the one hand it's sensible on a basic level - McIntee's niche within the Virgin line was always as "the historical one," and so of course the fanwank he goes for is going to be a historical. And since *The Aztecs* has the consensus reputation as the best historical, it's an obvious reference.

But there's more to it. Way back in the actual Hartnell era we talked about the fact that the series did two stories set in non-European cultures in its first season, followed by roughly zero in the seasons to follow (unless you want to credit *The Crusade* for Islamic culture, which I don't but won't fault you if you do). Past that the Doctor has been the white British man who goes places and solves their problems for them. When the show has made a swing at being somewhat less white and colonialist it's been awkward at best, as in the at times cringe-inducing "a black character in every story" approach to Season Twenty-Five.

So by reaching back to *The Aztecs* McIntee is explicitly reaching for a road not taken within Doctor Who, in which the mandate to go anywhere in space and time actually includes things that aren't based primarily on middle and upper class white British culture. This is something that was, originally, part of what Doctor Who was but that fell out of the concept.

But there was a general decay of Doctor Who's broad potential over the first few seasons, and the nature of this decay is instructive here. Broadly speaking, what happened was that Doctor Who became more and more straightforwardly a science fiction program. In the early days there was science fiction, sure, but mutedly so. It's more remarkable than anyone bothers to notice that it took

Doctor Who seven stories to get around to one based around humanity's future in space.

It's fitting, in a bitter irony sort of way, that Doctor Who's first attempt at humanity's future in space came immediately after its last attempt at non-Western culture, simply because the two ideas were always so opposed in the first place. Because here's the dirty little secret of our space adventure fantasies of the future: they were always just fantasies of imperialism. Our futures are always understood through the past, and with the early 20th century decline of empire we naturally projected that fantasy outwards, space being the only place in which a new terrain to conquer might be found. And so we created our space-age future, a future that was nothing more than a last, desperate stab at imperialism that came to a technologically determined nothing, dashed against the staggering and vast emptiness of space. The space helmet and the pith helmet are indistinguishable from each other.

But in all of its racism, the Lovecraftian tradition actually stands as an alternative to this. Lovecraft's racism is distinct from that of colonialism, in that Lovecraft has no hope that nice white men can civilize the savage world. He views non-white races as monsters who will eventually bring humanity crashing back. He's actually more racist than colonialism in this regard, but the point remains - his vision of a cosmic horror does not extend from imperialist fantasies. (It is here worth considering *The Quatermass Experiment*, which posits a fundamentally Lovecraftian universe, with exploration of the stars linked to becoming a deadly fungus monster.)

In its earliest moments Doctor Who was at least partially a counter to the space age fantasy, but over time this resistance steadily eroded until by season five the Doctor was embroiled almost exclusively in stories with the plot of "the other is attacking our colony," and by the mid-Pertwee era the Doctor had become a science vicar dispensing his wisdom to the less civilized races of the universe. Until the 1990s, when the space age fantasy had finally crumpled, the end of the Cold War, for which the space race was always a thinly veiled proxy, serving as the final nail in the coffin of its lengthy abandonment.

And so in the wake of the space age fantasy's derailment McIntee engineers a return to Lovecraft's hostile universe. But not the racist Lovecraft whose contrast with colonialism is his despair at the possibility of it. Instead McIntee offers a vision of a Lovecraftian universe bubbling in the erased cultures of colonialism, such that what was erased by our imperialist fantasies creeps back. This vision is maintained even to the details of McIntee's take on Lovecraftian beasties in Doctor Who, positioning them as remnants of the past universe, literally erased and overwritten by our world.

This is the overriding image of the 1990s. The lurking horror of something that is erased. The other shoe waiting to drop. A peace time borne not out of any victory, lacking any stability, bounded menacingly by a leering trail of zeroes glaring eschatologically in the distance. The nineties are a soap bubble of calm always in the midst of bursting.

In this regard Doctor Who in its novel phase is a better metaphor than I could have realized at the time. A discarded relic of the past in which unusual power turns out to lurk. The image of McIntee's book torn and shoved in my desk is almost too potent even without the associated traumas and anxieties. This is what a childhood of the nineties is - a looming unease. The realization of deep and primal structures of fear and helplessness go well in the nineties. Alan Moore, in *The Birth Caul*, describes his own childhood bullying as an acquisition of some foreign tongue imposed upon him, repeating that "I learned the words." This is something oddly different, a learned unspeakability. The horror not of the social structure, but of its shocking absence. The fact that your books can be destroyed, in the very school where they tell you that reading is important, and nobody will care. That

there are mean and nasty things in the world that will hurt you for the sake of it, and nobody will ever stop them.

And yet I'm loathe to give up this bit of angst. Of course I am. We enjoy our symptoms. It's one of the most basic facts of maladaption - the way we revel in our own inadequacies. I don't want to give up my anger and frustration and confusion. I don't want to give up the shame of crying over it, or my guilt over my own hysteria. I don't want it to get better.

This is the other part of the nineties. The strange fusion of the antihero and the nonspecific darkness. Knowing that we were all surely fucked eventually was in an odd sense liberating. Once one accepts that one lives in a capricious universe one is oddly free to go about one's business. The New Adventures have an anger to them that Doctor Who hadn't had in the past. This is part of why something like *Lucifer Rising* had so much trouble just letting go and enjoying being Doctor Who. Because there's a curious little death drive in this. It's fun to be the cancelled show. It's liberating to be at the bottom.

And on the one hand *White Darkness* points towards that, finding a giddy pleasure of discovery in the abandoned structures of the past. It's fun to locate Cthulhu in the road not taken by Doctor Who in the 1960s. It's clever. The fact remains that Doctor Who still, to this day, has a chronically unresolved issue with non-western cultures. The promise of *Marco Polo* and *The Aztecs* is still, nearly fifty years later, unrealized in the series and a scab worth picking at. McIntee's iconoclastic vision is important.

But equally, *White Darkness* is aware of the trap it risks falling into. This pleasure in picking at the scabs of Doctor Who's various injuries is a real one, and perhaps even a productive one, but it is ultimately destructive. The anger implicit in the discarded and decaying dreams of space age imperialism, or in the cancellation of your favorite show, or in the carefully nursed anger at a school full of bullies is pleasurable, sure. But it's still destructive anger. *White Darkness* interrogates the character of New Ace, suggesting that she's only good for killing now. It's a sharp observation, but one that might as well be turned against its own structure. Is mining the discarded past and angrily nursing the countercultural grudge going to offer anything more than tonic to a cult audience? One who can take its solace without even, strictly speaking, reading the books? Is this any way to bring back a television show?

There was another bully with whom I was actually friends in sixth grade, and another New Adventure that goes with it. In the summer between it and seventh grade, however, there was a sleepover at his house that I attended. It went poorly - after intrigued looks at a stack of Playboys that another friend had smuggled to the sleepover it turned to a game of strip poker. This was past my eleven-year-old sensibilities - a bridge too far. I cowered in the other tent reading *Theatre of War* until I was told they were done. As eleven and twelve-year-old boys do, they opted to prank me, mooning me when I returned. I snapped, wanting to go home, causing the dissolution of that friendship. It turned into the worst bullying I ever received in my life, including, in late 1996, one of the earlier cases of cyberbullying around.

I got a message from him on Facebook a year or so ago, apologizing for what happened well over a decade ago. It meant the world to me. But I couldn't bring myself to respond. I was at a loss for words, unable to conceive of what a world where I forgave him even looked like even as I did just that. I still haven't written back. I still haven't actually finished *Theatre of War* either. Sometimes we need our wounds more than we need atonement.

But I've finished *White Darkness* now. And it was good. For all its flaws, and indeed, because of its flaws. Because of its uncertain anger, its knowledge of what scab to pick but its lack of any

clear knowledge of how to treat the underlying wound. Because of its desperate hope that just ripping off the bandage might be a form of healing. Because somehow, in spite of everything, this cynical surrender to the inevitability of a hazily defined breakdown is still a form of progress.

Blinded by what was, we march, stumbling every step, into the present.

Clinging to the Skin of this Tiny World (The TV Movie)

For my money, this is the best post I've ever written on *TARDIS Eruditorum*. I was a day away from starting it when the Sandy Hook shooting took place. I remember getting up and a few minutes later my mother stopping by on her way home from Starbucks to tell me that she'd heard there was a shooting. The news filtered out slowly over the morning, and my wife and I ran some errands. We stopped for lunch, I checked my phone, and the full death toll was released.

The next few days involved stumbling around in a daze. The town was completely paralyzed by news media covering the funerals, and wherever you went everybody was just sort of lurching forward, unable to wrap their heads around the fact that this had happened in their town. Being a strange and not entirely functional sort of person who copes with just about anything by writing, I decided to get back to work. Which meant the TV movie entry.

As I say in the piece, it was always going to be autobiographical. My take on the TV movie was going to be that it marked the point where being a Doctor Who fan became unsustainable - where the fragile soap bubble of the wilderness years that Virgin had maintained finally popped. And that meant writing about my life in Eighth Grade when it aired, which meant writing about Newtown. And there just wasn't a way I could do it without trying to tackle the issue.

I had no idea what I was going to do when I started. No clue how I was going to get the analysis of the TV movie itself to fit into that autobiography. But once the words started they didn't really stop - this came out in two stretches of writing over as many days, almost unbidden. There are a few posts on the blog I barely remember writing, and this is one of them. I remember we visited my wife's parents at one point in there, and I got to experience the unique awkwardness of meeting soon-to-be extended family at a holiday party when you're from a town where twenty children just got murdered. But other than that it's blank - just me and the keyboard working through the prose.

What should have been the hardest part - the transition into talking about Doctor Who - was oddly obvious. I realized almost immediately that any transition there would be jarring, and so just didn't bother with one, figuring I could go meta later. The bit about the Chinese restaurant and the few paragraphs after that were actually something I posted on Facebook the day of the shooting that I repurposed. I added a few sections in over the next few days as further horrors and stupidities presented themselves, but otherwise this is as it came out of the keyboard over two days.

It's May 14, 1996. (That is the date we're going with in this post. You'll understand.) Mariah Carey is at number one with "Always Be My Baby," while Bone Thugs-N-Harmony, Celine Dion, Coolio, Tracy Chapman, R. Kelly, and Whitney Houston also chart. As does Alanis Morissette with "Ironic," which isn't. Those are, of course, the US charts. The UK goes with George Michael in number one with "Fastlove," with Gina G, Smashing Pumpkins, and Blur also in the charts. And, actually, both Liverpool FC and the Manchester United FA Squad dueling it out in the charts instead of the pitch. So that's funny too.

In news, let's go with the whole month of May, since we never did. ValuJet Flight 592 crashes in the Florida Everglades, killing 110. Thunderstorms and a tornado kill 600 in Bangladesh. The MV Bukoba sinks, killing a thousand. Eight die on Mount Everest in severe weather. Fifty-three die in a Sudanese jet crash. Outside of calamitous death, Benjamin Netanyahu is elected Prime Minister of Israel for the first time, the Supreme Court overturns a Colorado state law forbidding municipalities from protecting gay rights, and the Duke and Duchess of York divorce.

While on television… we have a problem. Or, at least, I do. This was always going to be an autobiographical post. I feel like I need to put that out front in it, before the analysis. I've known this post would be autobiographical since *Planet of the Spiders*. This entry was in part about the end point of a childhood love of Doctor Who: the moment where it came crashing down, becoming an old past love, on the shelf following *Masters of the Universe* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, remembered with affection, but clearly and decisively left in the past. The weird British sci-fi show I was the only one who had heard of made a new movie for American television, my friends and tormenters watched it, and… it sucked. There was nothing to defend. People came up to me the next day and told me that they'd seen that Doctor Who thing I liked so much, and it sucked. And I couldn't disagree. They had me dead to rights. The big, climactic return had happened, it was awful, the series keeled over and died again, and that was that. There was nothing left to do but walk away. And so there's the lens of history. 1992 to 1996: my Doctor Who fandom. Which, of course, involves some reflection on the early days of my fandom, curling up in the corner of a fifth grade classroom in Newtown, Connecticut and reading Target novelizations.

And then the day before I was set to write this post some bastard murdered twenty children in my town.

It wasn't my elementary school where twenty kids got murdered. I went to Head 'O Meadow school, on the other side of town. I know people who went to Sandy Hook, obviously. The town's school system worked by having four separate elementary schools that merge together after into single middle and high schools. So plenty of my middle school and high school friends went to Sandy Hook Elementary School.

The school, for what it's worth, is named for the part of Newtown it's in. It was founded almost as soon as the main town was, in 1711. The town's symbol is a golden rooster, the weather vane from the top of what is now the Newtown Meeting House, previously the Congregational Church. General Rochambeau and his troops camped in Newtown in 1781 marching towards Yorktown, Virginia. Local legend has that they used the golden cock for target practice, a figurative shooting at the golden dawn.

The main town is based on a pair of roads crossing what is now Main Street. The first, now Sugar Street and Glover Avenue, is the road my parents live on. The second, now West Street and Church Hill Road, winds to the east down into Sandy Hook, a settlement a few miles from the main town founded by people looking for larger plots of land. Sandy Hook lies along the Pootatuck River, named for the indigenous tribe that sold the town in the first place. That tribe continues to be denied federal recognition in any of its forms. The Pootatuck was the same river where, in 1986, Richard Crafts disposed of his murdered wife's body by feeding her through an industrial woodchipper in the midst of a November Blizzard three days before the final part of *Terror of the Vervoids* aired. The murder was lightly adapted to form part of the plot of the Coen Brothers movie *Fargo*.

The river eventually turns to the artificially built Lake Zoar near the Stevenson Dam, one of the largest dams in the United States that also serves as a bridge. It lies on Route 34, which turns off of Church Hill Road right before one gets to Sandy Hook Elementary School. The killer lived on one of the streets off of Route 34, right near the town's high school, and about two blocks from where the author of *The Hunger Games,* Suzanne Collins, lives. At the corner of the plot the high school sits on, Wasserman Way winds up towards the Fairfield Hills campus, the site of a former mental institution that now sits as a crumbling white elephant. The buildings were in poor condition when the hospital closed in 1995, and delays in deciding what to do with the property meant that when it finally was sold to the town the buildings were nearly beyond repair. In 1941 five attendants were charged and

two were convicted for beating patients, one of them fatally. The hospital was a hotbed of the fad in psychosurgery, conducting a hundred lobotomies in a single year.

It would, of course, be trivial to knock all of this together into a meta-narrative about the unsettling flavor of the place. Violent murder and mistreatment of the mentally ill. It's like psychogeographic gold. The truth is that Newtown's a perfectly ordinary suburban smear in the northeastern megalopolis. The refrain that these things don't happen here is the definition of silliness. This is exactly the sort of place that these things happen. We stared at Littleton, Aurora, and Oak Creek with the same slack-jawed horror that we're now stared at. That you'll be stared at when it's your town. We carried out the same empty rituals of public mourning that are now done on our behalf. The #prayfor____ Twitter hashtag serves every purpose. The shop-worn descriptions that get trotted out. "A quiet town." Now a rallying cry for gun control laws that are never going to happen.

And by the time this posts, a week and a half since the shooting, you'll have moved on. We'll just be another town on the familiar list, waiting for the next entry. Until then comes the lachrymose pornography of public mourning: candlelight vigils, the same photographs of police cars and ambulances outside buildings, interchangeable glurge from politicians. Even David Cameron weighed in to tell us his thoughts were with us. The President visited. I bet we'll even get a benefit concert or comic or something.

More than anything, I want to skip that. I want to opt out of the nauseating theatre of our public mourning. I'm told reliably that America is grieving with me, and I wish they'd stop. Because if I hear one more person ask what's wrong with the world I'm going to scream. What's wrong with the world is that you've already started to forget. What's wrong with the world is that we built a world where things like this happen and there's a process to deal with them and then we all just move on. That we've developed an entire cultural apparatus to anesthetize the shock and horror of this so that we can move on to the next time it happens. Our beloved master narratives.

There are few topics in Doctor Who, or indeed, in the history of television in general as meticulously and forensically analyzed as the failures of the TV Movie. Everybody knows what went wrong here. And I've been setting it up for entries. Still, in the interests of completism, let's go ahead and rehearse the autopsy. As I said back in the post on *Lungbarrow*, the usual thing that is seized upon as evidence of the TV Movie's wretchedness is the establishment that the Doctor is half-human. This is ridiculous. The most obvious thing to seize on is the fact that the Doctor's half-human nature, which is explicitly said to be reflected in his retina structure, is never actually used to affect the Eye of Harmony, which we're told can only be opened by human eyes. A major revelation about the character, repeated three times throughout the movie, never actually has anything to do with resolving the plot. There's some evidence that this is something that got lost in successive rewrites - the fact that the Doctor is half human is mentioned by the Master in such a way as to suggest both that the Doctor tried to open the Eye at some point and that he failed because he's only half human. But it doesn't actually parse or make any sense. The revelation is important enough to come up three times, but it's not important enough to do anything. This is so blindingly obvious that for nearly seventeen years I misremembered the plot of the story and just assumed it went the way you'd expect.

But the whole thing feels similarly cursory. Grace's character arc is absurd, and she flips from belief to disbelief almost entirely based on the needs of the plot. Even less thought, shockingly, seems to have gone into the question of how to introduce the series to new viewers. Sylvester McCoy has several times suggested that the biggest problem with the TV Movie was that he was in it, which overstates the case, but not by as much as you'd think. It's not that introducing the idea of regeneration is too much. But McCoy's character is too perfunctory to generate any audience attachment, and

McGann's version doesn't meaningfully show up until the halfway mark, spending a healthy chunk of time dealing with post-regenerative trauma, which is here an even worse idea than in *The Twin Dilemma*. Huge quantities of stuff are put in odd places - the relationship between the blue thing labeled "Police Box" that whizzes around the screen and the room in which McCoy's Doctor sits must have been baffling to anyone unfamiliar with the old "bigger on the inside" routine.

Typically this is blamed on the excessive number of Philip Segal's "kisses to the past," as though the continuity was too dense to follow. This is only partially true. Certainly McCoy's point - that it would have made more sense to give McGann the entire ninety minute block in which to properly be the Doctor - is sound. The TV Movie is a prime example of something that tries simultaneously to appeal to a hypothetical new audience and to appease a base of entrenched fans and fails spectacularly at both. What's really striking, though, is the lack of meaningful effort made at both. Other than the strange structure imposed by McCoy's presence it's difficult to argue seriously that the excess of existing continuity obscures what's going on here. No, what obscures the plot is the fact that nobody has bothered to think through how to introduce Doctor Who to a new audience, instead just throwing in a standard Campbell-by-numbers set of plot beats in with no attention to the fact that McCoy's presence should force a different structure or to making them intelligible as anything other than familiar story beats.

Instead we get generic American cult sci-fi. It appears that given the choice between going to series with Doctor Who and producing another season of *Sliders* Fox opted for the latter. To be fair to the TV Movie, for all of its innumerable flaws it is not, in fact, worse than *Sliders*. The reason *Sliders* was picked ahead of it was purely that *Sliders* was made in-house by Fox. In fact the TV Movie is about as good as *Sliders*, which is in some ways more damning. There's a slightly irritating current of thought about the TV Movie that suggests that its problem is that it's "American." While I'm never one to turn down the opportunity to prefer the UK to my own country, this is at least a bit unfair. The problem isn't that it's American, but that the specific type of American television it's emulating is mediocre, and it has no ambitions whatsoever towards surpassing that mediocrity. The TV Movie is trying to be bland and pointless American sci-fi, it succeeds admirably, and for that, at least, it is rightly hated.

Certainly the people in it seem to have a distinct lack of interest in being here. Eric Roberts, for all the criticism he gets, is at least having fun with the script. His decision to devour large swaths of scenery locate him firmly in the tradition of Graham Crowden and Joseph Furst. Which is to say that he's not destined for fan acclaim, but he's easy to like if you're of the mind to. Geoffrey Sax is actually on the ball, directing with a sense of droll whimsy that at least makes a noble effort to have something oddball in the story. But past that finding things to praise is a challenge. The less said about Yee Jee Tso and Daphne Ashbrook the better. Sylvester McCoy puts in an effort, but since his Doctor is overtly marginalized and made characterless in a doomed effort to deal with the narrative implications of starting with a regeneration there's nothing for him to work with.

And then there's Paul McGann, about whom… Look, however good he may be on the audios, he's on autopilot here. Curiously, he's much livelier in the audition tapes included as a DVD extra, where he's delivering lines out of the (mercifully) abandoned Leekley version. This is almost understandable - for all the horrific flaws of the Leekley version, it at least offered McGann a story arc instead of leaving him an essentially reactive character. But in many ways what's most striking is that so much of the DNA of the Leekley draft is still in this. The script is constantly harking back to a theme of parentage that has little relation to anything that's going on elsewhere in the script, a strange legacy of its development history. In any case, McGann has little to work with and seems at times to

be rooting against the project just so he can move on to something that isn't misery-inducing. His reluctance, initially, to come back to do the Big Finish material is utterly understandable.

We should also deal with the claim that the ratings were good. The usual excuse is that the episode was up against the episode of *Roseanne* in which John Goodman's character has a heart attack, but this holds little water. The movie aired in May, which is, in American television, what's called Sweep's Month - one of the three times per year at which advertising rates are determined, and thus where networks go all-out with big event television. Yes, Roseanne was doing a big show that week, but May is a month where everyone does big shows. The TV Movie was supposed to be Fox's big event, and it got lower ratings than the previous week's rip-off of *Twister*. It did indeed do better on the BBC, which at least demonstrated a general desire for Doctor Who to come back, but at this point we fall into one of the basic fallacies of television, which is to treat a given episode's ratings as indicative of how well that episode was liked. Ratings indicate how people thought they would like an episode. They tell us nothing about how popular it was, and there's little evidence that the TV Movie was considered good by much of everybody.

We haven't yet touched the fact that the TV Movie makes a complete mockery of Doctor Who's past continuity. There are two things we should note here. I have argued before that the proper measure of a story's canonicity is the degree to which it influences the future of the series. In that regard the TV Movie seems not so much to be non-canonical as anti-canonical: something that exists almost entirely as a negative example that the future of the series actively avoids copying. It would be one thing if the half human revelation were simply ignored in the same way that Cho-Je and the Watcher are. But the subsequent series has gone out of its way to bring up the possibility of the Doctor being half human just to shoot it down. There are, I think, several reasons for this. The first is the fact that it simply jars with so much else in Doctor Who. But plenty of other things do as well: the series is littered with radical breaks from the past. As much as people grouse about the difficulty of reconciling *School Reunion* with *The Five Doctors*, they don't get nearly as bent out of shape about it as they do over the half human revelation.

Which suggests that there's something more about the half human revelation that requires rejection. The answer, I think, is the logic that it gets at. Its sheer superfluousness within the narrative suggests that it's there for no reason other than that everyone involved thought it was the sort of thing that belonged in the script. The Doctor/Grace kissing scene is similar: a detail that exists for seemingly no other reason than having an obligatory romantic subplot. These things are usually accused of being part of the Americanizing of Doctor Who, and that's certainly not untrue, but the important thing isn't that it fits into the American taste but the underlying logic here.

For all that the movie is packed with "kisses to the past," after all, the resemblance between this and Doctor Who is tenuous at best. It would be one thing if this were Doctor Who's take on American cult television. But Doctor Who never gets the drop on the American show. Instead we get the American cult take on Doctor Who, with Doctor Who's tropes and ideas overtaken and subsumed by the American tone. Crucially, this means that there's no real sense anywhere in this of the Doctor as a mercurial figure who drops into differing settings. The Doctor arrives on more or less contemporary Earth, by force. We never see anything that suggests the full scope of his character, or, more to the point, of the series' premise. The TARDIS may be a time machine, but the idea of "anywhere in space and time" is miles from this. And so we get a very different conception of who the Doctor is and what he does than we've ever seen before.

The first clue is the hilarious profusion of clocks inside the TARDIS. Part of this is a matter of packing in the "he's British!" signifiers, which, in American, means having him wear a frock coat and

be old-fashioned, so lots of clocks and candles in the TARDIS. But it also is the most crassly literal-minded interpretation of "Time Lord" imaginable. The Doctor has a TARDIS full of clocks to demonstrate that he's a Time Lord, and for no other reason. On the one hand this is moronic, but it does indicate the degree to which the story is animated by the idea that the Doctor is a Time Lord. But this is, predictably, interpreted in the most literal-minded way ever.

Throughout the TV Movie the Doctor demonstrates a new ability previously unseen in the series, which is the ability to know people's futures and pasts. Apparently there are those who suggest that there is some explanation here based on him having met the people he meets in this story before, but the implication, heightened by the bits of dialogue about the complexity of the web of time, are that the Doctor has some sort of quasi-psychic ability to sense the fate of people and see their timestreams. (A second suggestion of this comes up when the Doctor handles the clothes he adopts in the hospital and the discussion of it being a "Wild Bill Hickok" costume is replayed in a manner that suggests it being some sort of psychic impression the Doctor is picking up from the clothes.

This strongly implies a worldview not only in which history is fixed, but in which there is a sense of destiny and fate. It's not merely the oppressive arc of history, but a fixed set of individual destinies - ones that can be altered by the powerful, important people, but that is largely set in stone and immutable. Master narratives ahoy.

It would be lying to say that this is why I hated it in eighth grade. I didn't notice it at the time, at least not in an articulable form. But this is, at least, a large part of what is so miserable about the TV Movie: its sheer banality. There is no spark of strangeness in this version of Doctor Who. It's not just that there are no monsters or alien worlds. It's that the Doctor is not a figure of anarchy or of the weird. He's a figure of authority: an old-fashioned British man who sorts things out. He's the enforcer of our destinies.

This goes hand in hand with the TV Movie's eschatological tone. The world is going to end at midnight on January 1st, 2000, apparently. This isn't even overtly connected to your garden variety millennialism. The date, within the narrative, is nothing more than a coincidence. The Master just happens to have sent the TARDIS crashing to Earth in time for some millennial world-ending. Which is to say that the TV Movie buys into the logic of eschatology not just uncritically (after all, it does everything uncritically) but reflexively, adopting the cultural logic of the apocalypse as simply a basic aspect of the world. Again, it presents a world dominated first and foremost by master narratives. And not in a conscious way. The absolute dominion of the master narrative is not something that the TV Movie consciously points out. It's just completely rampant in its basic ideology. It's the unconscious assumption animating every single thing it does, from its Campbell-at-all-costs structure to its depiction of the Doctor to its setting.

Which brings us back to where we started. The strangely isolating drear of our ritual of public mourning. Pray for Newtown, we're told. Money for the families. The obligatory Presidential visit. I remember on the smaller scale, after my father's stroke. The two weeks where we got more baked goods than it was physically possible to eat. And then the silence as we found out who among my father's colleagues and running mates could be accurately called "real friends" who would come by and sit with him and confront the fact that a brilliant and funny man could barely speak anymore. Nobody wants to stick around for the long agony of grieving. They want to send a box of cookies to assuage their own grief and move on to something else. The grand gesture that can safely be followed with silence.

Newtown is a staggeringly rich town. A median household income of $90,000, twice the national average. We're 95% white. I remember when the high school did *West Side Story*. We made

terribly unconvincing Latino street gangsters. We do not need your money. We do not even need your prayers: we're a strong and good town, and can pull through this, hard as it will be. We've pretty much got this.

Recent news has revealed that the United States has been engaging in what are called "double tap" strikes in its drone attacks. These strikes involve hitting targets twice in rapid succession, such that the second strike hits first responders. One hundred and seventy-six children have been killed in these attacks. Thousands of people die every year in my own country because of inadequate health insurance. People commit suicide having slipped through the cracks of our mental health system. There are over two hundred and thirty-two rapes a day in the United States, and over six hundred and eighty-four a day worldwide.

The master narrative, of course, dictates that you care about all of these things less than you do twenty dead first-graders in my hometown. I, at least, understand why I care about the deaths in my back yard. Why do you? And so I am unable to feel anything but alienation from this public chorus of grief. This isn't my sorrow. This isn't my town in the news. This is some strange copy of it, edited to the sensibilities of wherever I'm reading about it. *The Guardian* likes us quiet and idyllic, and prefers the degree to which Adam Lanza cannot be understood. In the *Daily Mail* Adam Lanza was a ticking time bomb, and Newtown is a "small town forever tainted by tragedy" framed by a British woman who moved here and lost her son in the massacre. I'd check more, but I haven't the stomach for it.

There's a really, really great Chinese restaurant in Newtown called New Wok. Some of the best Chinese food I've had, anywhere, and I've eaten in some of the best Chinese restaurants in London and Chicago. One shopping center down there's a fantastic Italian bakery. I still have half a cheesecake from them that I bought to celebrate my girlfriend finishing her last day of work at her old job. And my favorite breakfast spot, King's, which we still call Leo's even though it hasn't been called that in over a decade, is right there too.

My comic shop is just up the road from Sandy Hook Elementary School. It's in an old train station, and Jerry Ordway buys his comics there. If he has something out that week he'll walk over to the rack and sign all the copies of it, and just leave them there. No fuss is made about it. The store never announces a signing or does anything like that. There's just signed Jerry Ordway comics sitting there. The comic shop is right near an old railway bridge that had low clearance, and trucks would keep ripping their tops off on the bridge.

Every year we do a big tree lighting ceremony. They line the streets with luminaria, almost right up to my house, and people park all around the house to walk down to Ram's Pasture and watch the tree get lit. For years the tree was the dumbest looking thing - we called it the Christmas Thumb because of how it looked lit, and one year the star fell over and just looked like a flying saucer over the tree. Last year the tree came down in one of the storms and they just started using a smaller tree nearby, so now most of the people at the tree lighting can't even see the tree.

Our main landmark is the flagpole. We tell people that if you look at it and wonder "is that the flagpole," it's not the flagpole. Because it's a giant flagpole smack in the middle of one of the busiest intersections in town. It's the most gloriously idiotic thing ever, and there are lots of photos of it at half mast on the Internet right now and none of them explain what it is or why it's so important to the town.

Most days these are the most important things there are to know about Newtown. And if everyone in the world is going to know the name of my town then I really wish they knew those things too and not just that some bastard murdered a bunch of children. I really wish they knew my Newtown

instead. My Newtown, where I was bullied for years for loving a weird British sci-fi show nobody had heard of. Where I watched a crappy American remake of the show and gave up on it for nearly a decade. Where for two years running the school where I was bullied has had Doctor Who-themed scarecrows outside it for their annual Halloween competition. A dumb little town indistinguishable from any other dumb little town, safely insulated from the arc of history and the teleologies that now insist that whenever it's talked about it's framed in terms of one horrible day.

A dumb little town, completely and wonderfully unique, just like all the other dumb little towns.

Earlier in this post, when I had to make the transition from the school shooting to Doctor Who, I opted to do it with a jump cut. I figured any attempt to smooth it out would just be tacky. Better to rip the band-aid off. You can go from Doctor Who to unimaginable tragedy easily enough. Going big's always easy. But to go from twenty dead children to a ropey sci-fi show is inappropriate. And yet next door to every family who's child didn't celebrate Christmas yesterday is one that played at normality. The transition from history to humanity is just a step down the street. Indeed, there's no real history in what happened in Newtown. Just twenty-six families, each of them wholly unique in their grief.

In May of 1996, I loved a silly British sci-fi show that was unlike unlike anything else on television. And then people I will never meet with power I will never dream of took it and made it just like everything else. And I walked away from it and lived my life in my own little town of tragedies and good Chinese food. And I live there still today.

Time Can Be Rewritten (*The Adventuress of Henrietta Street*)

One of the things *TARDIS Eruditorum* has become known for are what I call my gonzo posts - ones that don't conform to standard formats and instead do something a little more eccentric. Usually I plan these well in advance, but occasionally one sneaks up on me. I didn't realize I was going to write up *The Adventuress of Henrietta Street* up in a pastiche of its own style until I started.

One always hopes, in an entry like this, that one will fool someone, and sure enough one person in comments missed the joke and thought the quoted letters from Alan Moore and Grant Morrison were real. I'll spare anyone else that ignominious fate - virtually all of the "historical background" in this post is a complete fabrication, as are all of the supposed previous drafts of the novel. Literary criticism needs more blatant falsehoods, I think.

The joke about "Editor DW" is one I'd been saving in reserve for the right moment, and I cannot imagine a better moment than this one, especially as I got to leave it unexplained where, in any other post, I'd have had to point out the two possible things DW could stand for explicitly.

We should begin with context. *The Adventuress of Henrietta* street was released in November of 2001. Songs to reach number one in the charts that month included Afroman's "Because I Got High," Westlife's "Queen of My Heart," and Blue's "If You Come Back," while other artists to chart included Kylie Minogue, Michael Jackson, Britney Spears, Alicia Keys, Jennifer Lopez, Cher, the Dandy Warhols, Destiny Child.

News stories over the few months before the book came out included the execution of Timothy McVeigh in the US, the sentencing of Jeffrey Archer, the launch of Windows XP, 9/11, and the introduction of the iPod. The month the book came out, on the other hand, the Police Service of Northern Ireland replaced the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and, actually, that's about it - not a terribly exciting month.

The Adventuress of Henrietta Street is a uniquely problematic novel, and a proper understanding of it is only possible through consultation with the various drafts of it that exist. These drafts are at times obscure and difficult to find, but taken together present a considerably more complete portrait of the work. Some things, for instance, can be ruled out decisively. The rumors, for instance, that there exists a fully narrative draft that discards the novel's conceit of being written as a historical study of surviving documents is wholly false. Although Miles did, as is popularly reported, fail to mention this detail to Justin Richards when pitching the book, it is clearly a part of his basic concept. Simply put, the occult goals of the book would not be possible without such a conceit.

Ah yes. The occult goals. This is, after all, a novel in which the Doctor literally finds a whore to be his Scarlet Woman, and uses her in a grand alchemical wedding to root himself in the Earth. To accomplish this without the ambiguities and gaps introduced by the pseudo-historical would be a challenge, whereas the structural conceit allows Miles considerable leeway to work his spell by giving him considerable ability to leave things unsaid and to create moments of potent ambiguity. The false history, as a format, allows for fundamental manipulation of the nature of things.

Within the magical context of 2001, of course, to conduct such dramatics without at least some consultation with the dominant magical figures of the age would be foolish in the extreme. The earliest surviving manuscript of *The Adventuress of Henrietta Street*, in fact, survives in Alan Moore's papers. Moore, who was in the final stages of producing *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* when the manuscript crossed his desk, was none too pleased with aspects of the book, and

wrote Miles a detailed account of his objections.

Moore's letter to Miles, at a mere twenty-nine pages, is uncharacteristically perfunctory, betraying a deeper sense of frustration than his public comments, or lack thereof, would indicate. It is evident that Moore took Miles's manuscript extremely personally, and that his reservations were substantial. A representative passage:

"As you of all people must know, when someone writes about an incident after it's happened, that is history. But when the writing comes first, that's fiction. In my own *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* project I have adhered carefully to one side of this, restricting myself entirely to pre-existing parcels of idea-space. Your novel, however, crosses this line dangerously. For the most part it stays on the other side of the line, asserting the pre-existence of events wholly of your own creation. To tie Sabbath so directly to the literary tradition, then, risks making the entire thing real, and thus bringing about the radical transformation of the very nature of time in 1782. This may be acceptable with the Scot, but it won't wash with me."

The Scot, one assumes, is Grant Morrison, whose evaluation of the manuscript was entirely more succinct:

"Evil time gorillas!"

The missive was enough to at least partially alter Miles's plans, as Sabbath was redesigned to be less obviously based on Captain Nemo and more independent as a character. More troubling, however, is the matter of the man with the rosette. He is, of course, intended to be the Master. But this, by its nature, begins to blur things. The published version of the book itself gives four separate accounts of the meeting between the Doctor and the man with the rosette, and the earlier manuscripts offer at least two more, although the one in which the character is named "Steve" and goes on about editing can probably be set aside as a joke. The other, however, is altogether more interesting, in that it features a much-expanded version of the conversation.

The expansion focuses primarily on the subject of the nature of the universe, and provides further details on the man's claim that "our little duels would be utterly meaningless." In the published text, of course, this line is fraught with ambiguity. After all, the very appearance of the man with the rosette shows the extent to which their little duels remain pregnant with meaning. The draft text allows the Doctor a reply to this observation: "And yet you're here." The man's reply, "only the heart of me," is double-edged. It alludes, of course, to the novel's larger focus on the matter of the Doctor's second heart as a diseased artifact of the novels' previous continuity. But it also alludes to the way in which the man with the rosette is never named as such, even though his nature is obvious. In a real sense it is only the heart of the Master that appears here, as opposed to the character himself.

The subsequent conversation renders much of this explicit. The Doctor admits that he cannot actually remember the substance of their feud. The man comments that there are new feuds to be had, then trails off before, as in the original conversation, asking if the Doctor has met Sabbath. The tacit connection between Sabbath and "the substance" of their feud is more cutting than Miles should have been able to know, especially as this draft predates Richards's request to use Sabbath in subsequent novels. And yet it is an almost perfect skewering of Sabbath's role in the bulk of the subsequent Eighth Doctor Adventures, most particularly the way in which he steadily deflates into a cut-rate Master clone.

To what extent was Miles aware of the irony involved in this exchange, however? *The Adventuress of Henrietta Street* was, after all, touted as his great return from retirement. Ostensibly this was just a cynical grab for money, but Miles readily admitted in interviews that having decided to do a Doctor Who book for the money he was going to try for the best Doctor Who book ever. But

Miles's retirement was always an odd thing, given that he spent it writing the Faction Paradox audio series for BBV and, subsequently, starting work on the series for Mad Norwegian. To say that Lawrence Miles ever left Doctor Who is fundamentally misleading. And in this regard the strange persistence of the Master within his thought is revealing.

Tacit in this omitted discussion about the heart of the Master is the fact that were the character to appear under his own name it would have put the lie to his basic premise of a universe that has moved on from the underlying principles of pre-*Ancestor Cell* Doctor Who. Even in the published version, as "the man with the rosette" it's clear from the book's reception that his appearance sucked the oxygen from the rest of the book. The revelation of four surviving Time Lords proved, in the book's reception, to be the bit everyone paid attention to. Which is to say that the book, in that scene, proved the inadequacy of its own efforts. But how much is this, like the anticipating of Sabbath's later role, Miles admitting to the extent to which he cannot do the work he wants apart from Doctor Who.

The language Miles uses to describe Doctor Who is in this regard revealing. He has referred several times to Doctor Who as his "native mythology." The idea of a mythology as a homeland suggests a sort of narrative Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. That Doctor Who can't escape the narrative gravity of the Doctor/Master conflict is unsurprising. More telling is that Miles can't escape it - that his storytelling, no matter how experimental it attempts to be, is not only stuck in Doctor Who's orbit, it's forced to constantly reinforce the underlying tenets of that mythology. For all that he is feted as a visionary writer, and for all that he enjoys questioning the mythology of Doctor Who, he cannot push his mythos outside the constitutive terms of its native homeland.

Nowhere is this clearer than in terms of Miles's difficulties with the notion of time, and particularly his continual obsession with the possibility of a new form of time or history. The idea that the non-existence of the Time Lords has altered the nature of time is a basic premise of *The Adventuress of Henrietta Street*, and this hues close to his depiction of the Enemy in his writings on the War. That said, he has always remained problematically coy about the nature of the Enemy. In *The Book of the War* he describes them only as "a process" and "a new kind of history," and essentially no entries of the book focus on their nature or what they do. Much like the alternate concept of time in *The Adventuress of Henrietta Street*, he never manages to expand on what this new sort of history actually is. It is tempting, in fact, to suggest that he doesn't actually know, and that "new kind of history" is just a terribly attractive phrase that he's embraced more for its conceptual heft than for any actual idea based on it.

Miles elaborates somewhat on the issue in his reply to Alan Moore's objections. As is characteristic of Miles the reply is over the top in its willful petulance, and, for at least some tastes, hilariously funny. After several paragraphs of extremely suggestive jokes about his beard, Miles gets down to business:

I am not at all certain why you are so hung up on the idea that 1782 happened, however. Unless, of course, you've been there? But this seems unlikely. Surely 1782 is notable in a large part because of the decline of the Whigs and their view of history. If ever there is a period in which rejecting the established line of history in favor of the possibilty of new futures it is surely the period to go for. If anything I'm surprised to see a supposed anarchist adhering so slavishly to the idea of a fixed timeline. Surely the overthrow of the idea that there's a authoritarian order to history is worth pursuing.

Despite his adamance, however, we should note that he did, in fact, tone down the Captain Nemo aspects of Sabbath as per Moore's requests. This is in some ways typical of Miles, whose performative offensiveness has always had a complex relationship with his actual art. That he did, in

fact, back down on the implicit linking of Sabbath with the fictional tradition suggests that, for all his bluster, he was sensitive to the potential complexities of an overly entangled engagement. Simply put, there's a clear limit to how much he wanted to destabilize the basic order of history and imagination.

It should be stated clearly that the draft sent to Moore is not particularly invested in this approach. None of the drafts are, in fact. This makes sense: Miles was, in all of his correspondence and writings about the book, intensely conscious of the fact that his was the first book to really return to the question of the pre-*Ancestor Cell* continuity as something to be engaged with instead of run from in a variety of ways. Which is to say that the underlying stability of the universe is, for Miles, a central concern. In fact, it is to a large extent the point of the book as Miles saw it: seeing the Doctor restore some amount of balance to the nature of time. For all that the book, in any of its drafts, stresses the possibility of altering, to quote the published draft, "the human psyche's relationship to time, space, and the environment of mankind," it is important to note that in every version it reaffirms the original structure of the universe.

Is Miles, in the final analysis, actually this conservative? Is the larger point of his work really the immutability of time? Does he really view the Doctor as primarily a force pursuing the stasis of the universe? Well, yes, at least in part. Miles has long complained about his own decision to render the Doctor as a fetish object in *Alien Bodies*. And virtually all of his Doctor Who work since that has been struggling against that. Not, notably rejecting it. Miles may have, in later interviews, professed his intensive dislike of the legacy of *Alien Bodies*, but one must read between the lines of his comments, in which he frames his regret as an apology for the ways in which Steven Moffat has expanded on his ideas.

Is it overly deconstructive to note the anxiety implicit in this complaint? As much vitriol as Miles hurls at Moffat's work, his complaint is ultimately that he deserves credit for large swaths of it. Miles layers this with a savvy self-deprecation, which is typical of his style. But the result is still puzzling - ultimately Miles argues that one should dislike his work because of how bad Moffat's work, which he takes credit for, is. But this isn't quite disowning his own work. It never has been - all of his subsequent books reiterate the basic point he takes himself (via Moffat) to task for. In *Interference* the Doctor, or at least the past continuity of Doctor Who, becomes the fetish object on which a vast upheaval of the cosmic balance is predicated. In *The Adventuress of Henrietta Street*, the Doctor almost single-handedly rescues a vision of history.

Despite Miles backing down from the most extreme vision of the novel, we must not understate the novel's ambition, conservative as it may be. Miles is engaging in an explicit act of magic with this novel - a point he sets up within it through a lengthy passage reflecting on the equivalence of magic and fiction. Yes, Miles ultimately acceded to Moore's decree and declined to target the real world with his ritual. But he still targets Doctor Who, and the effects are profound. *The Adventuress of Henrietta Street* is, it appears, a consciously constructed magical working intended to repair Doctor Who's lurch into conceptual ambiguity. Miles wills that the nature of Doctor Who should be fixed, not just as a cultural phenomenon but internally. He reshapes the Doctor Who universe so that there is a limit on the degree to which it can be transformed.

But, of course, as with any magical working there is the danger of unintended consequences. Miles did fix the nature of Doctor Who, yes. He intended this as an exorcism - a delineation of where Doctor Who gave out so that he could take his own alternative further. But he failed. By charting a firm border for his native mythology he ended up charting the point beyond which he could not go. The central metaphor of his book ended up piercing himself. He asserts that the ability to travel in time requires a firm anchoring in a home, hence the Doctor's elaborate ritual to tie himself to Earth.

But Miles could not see the consequences of the ritual he was weaving for himself. He failed to realize that he was tying himself immutably to his native mythology. Like the vision of vampires that dictate that they cannot sleep without the presence of their native soil, Miles made himself a prisoner of Doctor Who, unable to stray too far from it. And so *The Book of the War*, for instance, is notable in part because of the extent to which it simply cannot carve a space far enough from Doctor who to present an alternative.

But worse, Miles saves Doctor Who from itself. By fixing its core concept he sets the stage for its return. The damage done to the core concept by the shenanigans of *The Ancestor Cell* is, symbolically at least, healed. Miles, in effect, has put the central principles of Doctor Who outside the reach of the Time War, creating a space in which it can return. In this regard Miles's claim of credit for large parts of the new series is more true than he realizes. It is not that the central iconography of his stories is actively nicked as such. (This book, for instance, uses the same TARDIS/wedding line out of which Moffat crafts the ending of *The Big Bang*.) It is that Miles has symbolically fixed Doctor Who's concepts, and thus his work and doing are strewn throughout it, reincarnated and distorted. Even this concept is stored within Doctor Who - what, after all, are the Remote if not a metaphor for Miles's own relationship with Doctor Who?

There is, however, one puzzling footnote to the matter of *The Adventuress of Henrietta Street* that we ought resolve - a line seemingly without author. In the published version of the book the Doctor requests as a wedding present "six glass phials containing liquid mercury, of the type which might be used to forge the link between the worlds." This may seem a small matter, but given that it concerns the material components of the Doctor's mystical ritual, and thus, by extension, the details of what is written as the essential core concept of Doctor Who the oddity of its appearance seems worth commenting on. The line appears in none of Miles's drafts, including the final copy he sent to Justin Richards. Furthermore, none of the records of copyediting or editorial revisions show it being added. Even the final camera-ready copy does not contain the line. And yet in the final book it appears, a strange ghost event.

This is, of course, bizarre. Indeed, the entire camera-ready copy ends up with subtly different pagination than the published book, due purely to the addition of these extra twenty words, which in turn alter the remaining pages of Chapter Five. The only possible clue is a hand-written note found in a filing cabinet containing the instruction to "use alternate proofs" for Chapter Five. The note is signed "Editor DW," presumably a reference to Justin Richards's title as editorial consultant for the line. And yet the note is not in Richards's handwriting, and he, in interviews, has insisted that he has no memory of any such substitution.

The identity of this "Editor DW" remains impossible to determine.

People Made of Smoke (*Rose*)

This post terrified me for months leading up to it. I knew it would be the single moment of highest expectations in the entire blog - after nine months of wilderness years material that was at times deeply marginal, I was finally hitting the era of Doctor Who where all the fans are. And I had no idea what to do.

Ultimately I decided that anything short of excess would be insufficient, and that I'd just go full tilt through the episode and say absolutely everything I could possibly think of to say about it. Even still I offloaded about 2500 words of background about Eccleston and Piper into the preceding post, which kept this from quite being the longest *TARDIS Eruditorum* post ever.

I realized while watching the episode that the nature of the tail end of the McGann material meant that it had been nearly a month since I'd actually begun an entry with the standard TARDIS Eruditorum opening of the date and a discussion of the musical charts. Because that's such a familiar start, I like, when I get the chance, playing with the structure, which inevitably puts an entry in a bit of an odd footing. In this case I realized I could get away with leaving it out of the start and nobody would notice, so that when it finally appears at the end it feels like a big resolution, letting me build to the cathartic simplicity of the final sentence.

Once I worked that out it was just a matter of building to it. The metaphor of the caution tape developed naturally out of the Alan Moore pastiche that is the first paragraph. (It's rather shamelessly based on the start of his spoken word piece *The Highbury Working*) Emboitment is a concept from way back in my *Logopolis* post. The plot of *Logopolis* concerns what Christopher Bidmead calls Charged Vacuum Emboitments. "Emboitment" means "putting in a box," basically, and quickly became one of my favorite words ever.

Musing on *From Hell* and its connections to *Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*, Alan Moore posited that in holistic detection "you wouldn't just have to solve the crime, you'd have to solve the entire world that the crime happened in." Brilliant. Slap out some business cards. Philip Sandifer. Holistic media critic. Get to work. Except this terrain is slippery. The distinction between world and crime becomes vague,until everything becomes a crime scene, ready for its evidence bag giftwrap and careful analysis. Still, in a world of crime scenes there must be kings. The random acts of vandalism, wall scrawl fiction for the anoraks huddling under the bridge, must in time add up to something. To the big one. The shocking crime in an otherwise nice neighborhood. "These things don't happen here." Of course they don't. Ropey sci-fi programs that haven't been popular since the 1970s don't come back to be the biggest thing on television. That's not how this works. And yet here's the crime scene, splatters of anti-plastic everywhere. No point in getting all holistic now. This time we keep it simple. We just solve the crime. Tape off the scene, form a perimeter. Perform whatever banishings you feel appropriate. And then let's get to work. Forty-four minutes and ten seconds of history, rounded by yellow caution tape. Go slow, be meticulous. What the hell happened here?

A brief stab at showing the world - a perfectly ordinary thing for what we might charitably call "this sort of show." The music swells, the camera accelerates, and we plunge breathless. (Already we are invoking old things - Doctor Who has begun an episode like this before.) We fall into the world, towards Britain, towards London, and then… into an alarm clock.

This is not where we're supposed to be; drum and bass montage of Billie Piper, eponymous

Rose, in a high speed run of fast cuts, going about her day. A banal shop-girl's existence in the buzzing heart of London. Trafalgar Square, in amongst the swirl of double decker busses, what stands out is the aggressive willingness of the episode to date itself, from Rose's trendy-almost-to-the-week overly pink bedroom to a Starbucks and an advertisement for *The Lion King* appearing in shot. It takes all of a minute for us to know Rose, to know her living situation, her well-meaning but slightly oafish boyfriend, her uninspiring job. We all know her. There's not a viewer in Britain who does not know her after this sequence. Ten point eight million of them. More than anything else on television that week save four *Corries* and a pair of EastEnders. Eighteen percent of the country. In unison run smack into Rose Tyler, *Sun*-child of the popular culture.

And yet haunting this montage is a series of odd cuts and shot framings. A camera staying on for a second after Rose has left the shot, focusing on a lone mannequin, or a shot inexplicably framed so that a trio of mannequins are the focal point instead of Billie Piper. There's something ever so slightly wrong about this - an oddness from outside this sphere of television that haunts proceedings. And by the time she arrives in the basement the nature of the scene has shifted.

Still, we're in the realm of the firmly understandable. Show this to someone who has no idea what they're watching and they'll make perfect sense out of it. It's self-evidently a horror movie. Billie Piper is playing the first reel sacrificial lamb - the one who's about to get horribly butchered by some slathering beast. Or it's a detective show, and she's going to find Wilson's body, leading to the real plot. One or the other. But it's completely straightforward. That's what happens on television when attractive blonde things wander around in the dark.

Two things, however, interrupt this scene. The first is the haunting we've already spoken of - these strange mannequins. Yes, the viewer has a pretty solid idea of what sort of story this is, and once the scene of Rose calling out for Wilson stretches beyond a few seconds any possibility that this is going to resolve into a "find the body" plot evaporates. Instead we're firmly in the reach of horror. We ought contrast these first two stretches of the program. In the first minute or so we get a swift montage of who Rose Tyler is - an extremely deft and efficient bit of characterization. In the second, we get over two minutes of luxuriation in content-free shadow lurking. Over a minute of air time is spent with Rose walking around in the basement of the shop, over which hangs the knowledge that something bad is going to happen.

But let's pause here and look at our overall televisual literacy and what it's telling us. On some level we know Billie Piper is going to be OK. (And we should note that she is still Billie Piper - nobody has called her "Rose" yet.) A brief glimpse at the paratext reveals that the episode is named after her character, which is as good insurance as anyone gets (though I suppose she could still end up Laura Palmering some murder mystery from this setup). But more to the point, we spent a minute getting to know her character. The montage was curiously too much and too little. We know her too well for her to be cannon fodder. But it's a slender reed - less something that drains the suspense out of the scene and more something that nags at us, haunting what we see.

And then there are the mannequins, which are clearly still important to this - and important even within the context of this basement scene. Watch the scene where she flicks the lights on, ostensibly ratcheting the danger back down by removing the darkness. But the lights are positioned so that all they illuminate are previously unseen mannequins. The mannequins have been haunting this show for its entire (three minute) run-time, lurking Chekovianly over its mantlepiece, aching to fire. But, of course, it doesn't make sense how or why they would. Not within the logic of what we have here. There's a coherent litany of things that could be waiting in that basement to butcher Billie Piper, and evil mannequins are decisively not on that list. And yet after two minutes of teasing, that is exactly

what we get. Evil mannequins.

But there is a second interruption; to the caution-tape perimeter we've set up. It is about to be breached. The perimeter demarcates forty-four minutes and ten seconds of televisual space. But it does not merely encompass a set of filmized video frames and an audio soundtrack that have been captured on our DVD sets, or digital format of choice. We're tracking a live transmission here - a signal that was actually beamed out at a specific time, into people's houses and lives. *Rose* is not a text. It is an event. It happened. And as it happened, in the course of that transmission there were what are conventionally described as "technical difficulties." Twice through the cellar sequence - once about a minute into Rose's Wilson-calling, and once as the Autons are menacing Rose, audio broke through from a set on which Graham Norton was preparing for the next broadcast of *Strictly Dance Fever*. And so as Rose wanders around calling for Wilson there is a round of applause, and then, as she cowers from the onrushing mannequins, Graham Norton inquires as to where he should be sitting.

Let us pause to consider this piece of evidence for a moment. It is immediately recognizable to anyone even remotely familiar with occult technique as an inadvertent execution of the cut-up method. Originated by William S. Burroughs and Bryon Gysin, the cut-up method involves taking fragments of one or more existing texts that are physically cut up and reassembled to form a new text. Where Burroughs mainly used the approach textually, Gysin became interested in it as an auditory technique, crafting pieces like "Pistol Poem," a 1960 cut-up of gunfire and disordered counting, for the BBC. The premise of the cut-up is early postmodernism: the technique of transporting something out of its natural context so as to inject that context into some new context. By reordering the conceptual space of a soundtrack we reorder the ideas, changing the symbols themselves. It's as old an alchemic process as has ever existed: by manipulating the symbol, you manipulate the thing.

(The cut-up technique was also influential in the creation of early electronic music, which had a similar approach of physically dismantling and reassembling media. "Pistol Poem" was recorded the same year Delia Derbyshire started work at the BBC. Derbyshire would go on to use electronic cut-up techniques to produce the theme to…)

And so Graham Norton is cut-up into this broadcast, right along with the ill-fitting mannequins. The result is a strange miasma of television and culture, only jumbled together wrong and turned into a nightmare that closes in, ready to swallow Billie Piper. It's exactly the scene we expected - Billie Piper's butchery, her grisly and spectacular death at the hands of some lurking horror. But it's not just shop mannequins now - it's expanded to be an attack from the entire culture, from the very fabric of TV. From Graham Sodding Norton.

Joss Whedon has said that the original image for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was him imagining an inversion of the standard horror opening of the blonde girl getting butchered. He imagined it playing out exactly like you'd expect - the character who the audience knows is a vampire luring the dumb blonde down an alley, getting ready to kill her, and then, right where we expect the money shot, she fights back and kills the vampire. But when he actually did the first episode of *Buffy* he ended up inverting his own first image, instead having it be that the dumb blonde is the vampire and the boy is the helpless victim who gets eaten. And so his original opening, his brilliant invocation and inversion of the horror movie trope, remains slightly erased, lurking in the background of *Buffy*. Waiting to get nicked by Russell T Davies, who here sets up the exact same thing. Rose, the blonde pop star, is in the basement, ready to get butchered. Only instead of revealing that she's secretly the vampire slayer, Davies makes a very different revelation: she's secretly a Doctor Who companion.

Run.

It's a perfect invocation of strangeness. The utterly pointless (save for making a nice visual) shot

of the Autons karate-chopping a steam pipe open. The way in which the Doctor enters the narrative, a hand from off-screen grasping Rose's. (Note that the Autons are also threatening her with hands.) This is old magic - an invocation of a deep-lying tradition otherwise forgotten. It is worth noting that there is no reason for the Doctor to take Rose's hand here, and less of one for them to continue holding hands as they begin running through corridors. It's pointless. It's silly. It is, in its own way, a conceptual cut-up - a random detail from an older legacy, specifically the tendency in Doctor Who's eighth through tenth seasons of having Jon Pertwee hold Katy Manning's hand while they ran, which he, in reality, did mainly because Manning was blind as a bat without her glasses and when she attempted running for the first time on-set ran smack into a tree. Here the act is shorn of its context, injected into Rose's little horror story, and we're off to the races, Rose's story intruded upon by this mysterious Other.

We should observe how the act is not entirely faithful to the original either. The Auton hand attack is not actually from the same set of iconography as the Doctor and Jo holding hands and running. It's from the same era, but these are things that are linked in ideaspace, not in any real temporal sense. The bulk of the Auton hand imagery comes from *Spearhead From Space*, Jon Pertwee's first story, whereas Katy Manning and the hand-holding are very much from Pertwee's fifth story, *Terror of the Autons*, which *Rose* also invokes, but completely separately. *Terror of the Autons* isn't the mannequin one. It's a small point - I mean, they're both Auton stories - but it's a significant one, in that Doctor Who is also being cut up and reassembled, creating a sort of summary of itself - the key points of Doctor Who distilled and rearranged.

Notably, once the Doctor shows up all notion of the horror plot is banished. Billie Piper is fine. This strange man in the leather jacket has control of this narrative, and Billie Piper has fallen out of her world and into his, at least momentarily. Because it is momentary. The scene of the Doctor and Rose together and in the same show lasts all of ninety seconds before Rose is bounced out of this new show she's found herself in and is given leave to return to her own show. But in these ninety seconds several things of note are established.

First, there is the banishing of Graham Norton. "Am I here," he asks, and mere moments later the Doctor tacitly answers: no, you're not. I am. In doing so he immediately restores our sense of a perimeter, even as he intrudes upon the scene from outside. He has absolute control of this narrative space; it extends around him. And it is tangibly huge. The ninety seconds are full of strange dissonances - the caged mannequins in the hallway struggling to get out, for instance. Now that we have, broadly speaking, identified the mannequins as his the general strangeness of them stands out. They are, after all, occupying their space strangely; there are far too many of them, the camera hangs on them oddly, there's the business of turning on the lights only to reveal them. And, you know, they're moving around and homicidal, so that's a bit strange too. But stranger still is the sense that there exists some explanation buried beneath all of this. It's not just that there's this shop full of evil mannequins - it's that there's evidently some sort of plan going on behind the scenes. The way in which the Doctor makes the jump from "Wilson's the electrician" to "Wilson's dead" points towards a logic we never see, a bare sketch of some hopelessly elaborate scheme on the part of the Autons to take over the world that self-evidently requires the electrician of this particular department store to die. (Watch how the rapid speed of this implies heavily the sheer size of this. Everything in this story is buzzing and moving about. There's too much here. It's joyfully excessive.)

Second is the fact that Billie Piper is able to function in this world. She falls out of her show (twice over - once into the horror movie, and then again into Doctor Who) and, upon landing in Doctor Who, is perfectly capable. That's the entire point of the "is it students" conversation - and

Eccleston plays it well, meticulously conveying the information. This stretch of television is his home turf, and he knows what's going on. He has to - his confidence that the plot makes sense is what dictates that it does make sense. (The image of sense becomes sense.) But he hadn't considered Rose's theory. It's wrong, obviously, but what's crucial is that when she first expresses it he can't figure out how she came to it. And when he asks her, idly testing her, playing, for a second (since he's in an elevator anyway), with this strange woman who's wandered into her show, she impresses him. It's a barest hint, but she can hold her own in this show.

Third is the fact that Rose is named here. For the first time in the show, she gets a name. Naming a thing is, ritualistically, an important step. Names have power. Rose can be invoked now, and, crucially, she only gains that ability when she's inside the same show as the Doctor. She gains identity by the proximity to his show. And yet after ninety seconds it shatters - Rose is left in her own show. She may have briefly fallen out of the world, but she's quickly shooed back in.

Structurally, this is inevitable. The malign influence of Joseph Campbell plays out irritatingly over the entirety of this scene. A key step in the hero's journey is the refusal of the call. The adventure must be rejected first before it can be truly accepted. This practice has great spiritual import - consider the practice of rejecting a convert to Judaism three times before accepting their conversion. Rejection and abandonment are a standard part of many occult initiations - magical societies will claim to reject a candidate just to see what they do, then accept them later with the revelation that it has all been a test. Or, if you want a more pop culture version of it, given the subsequent explosion of the department store, consider V's false rejection of Evie in *V For Vendetta*, where it turns out that an entire middle section in which Evie is seemingly arrested is an elaborate mind game.

Already a theory is shaping up: this is Rose's initiation. That's what this whole scene is - an initiation ritual for Rose Tyler. It's a familiar structure - the way you do these things. We've got it now, surely. The scene described. The perimeter made meaningful. We know what this is. Except… there's still something off. Not the blue box that haunts Rose as she runs - that we expect, her world having been infiltrated by the Doctor and his show. Even if we don't know what it is, we've been primed by the mannequins to get how these uncanny objects play out. (The TARDIS as an inexplicable conspicuity, of course, dates back to *An Unearthly Child* and the first shot of the series - more cutting up.) No, what is stranger are the thirty seconds of her running, afraid from the shop. It's shot horror-movie again - lots of time for anticipation and dread of what might be about to happen. But we're out on a London street now, right by Trafalgar Square. This is firmly Rose's space - where we began in her minute montage. And while thirty seconds isn't a lot, let's remember, this show did her characterization in a minute. When it slows down like this, forcing us to drink in the moment, we must take note of it.

The incongruity here is, of course, that the terror of Rose's world should be irrelevant. After all, the point of her initiation is to move her from this world to the Doctor's. That the Doctor's world haunts hers is necessary, but there's no reason to linger within the terror of her world that follows from the Doctor's intrusion. That's irrelevant if she's going to be taking up a permanent residence on the other side of the portal. So no. This is an initiation, yes. And a ritual, clearly. But it's not Rose's initiation. It's someone else's.

Keep surveying the scene. We move to watching telly on telly - a BBC News broadcast about the department store. So we've switched shows again. But the switching lags - we go from that to a single shot of the mannequin arm on an armchair, quietly reminding us that the barriers between shows are porous. (How else would Graham Norton have gotten through?) But now we're firmly in her show - a working class soap opera. Note how her mother's immediate concern is getting her back

to work, the night shots of the council estate, Mickey's utterly pedestrian interest in getting to the pub to watch the tail end of the match. This is a perfectly familiar setting. We know this show, just like we knew Billie Piper at first.

Still, to hammer home the point, we get a redo of the alarm clock. But instead of launching Rose into a dizzying characterization montage it launches her into the drear of day-to-day existence. Still, this sequence is all about characterization, and wonderfully deft characterization. Jackie Tyler reveals more about her fears and desires with her complaint that Rose's job at a high-end shop was "giving her airs and graces" than any amount of exposition could ever tell us. But also observe the tight angles and close-ups. The camerawork changes as we shift among shows. But quickly we're back to changing things up as we get the second encounter between Rose and the Doctor. Notably, it's only been a few minutes, but the trip through an entire new show - *EastEnders*, basically - makes it feel like a larger gap than it is.

What happens next, however, is revealing in several ways. Clearly the meat and matter of this ritual is the crossing of the boundaries among television programs and genres. But again, all evidence is that the end goal is crossing Rose into Doctor Who. Given that, what happens in the next scene is bizarre: the Doctor strolls into Rose's show. Or, more accurately, Rose grabs hold of him and yanks him in. There's a cheek here - the threshold of her apartment marks the physical line between the two shows. While he's outside the door he's in charge of the narrative space. But once Rose pulls him in he's distinctly not in his show anymore. This further rubbishes our briefly held notion that this is Rose's initiation. In fact, it's possible that it's the Doctor's - that this show is some sort of *Mork and Mindy*/*Dark Shadows* mash-up about the alien living on the council estate saving the world periodically.

It would be easy to play this as the fish out of water approach, where the joke is that the Doctor is utterly out of place here and doesn't know what to do. Indeed, that's what's expected. But that expectation is trivially subverted from the first moment. It's not that the Doctor slots straightforwardly into the soap opera; he doesn't. But all of this is exposed in the brief scene where he talks to Jackie. At first he plays along, giving the exact right responses to Jackie's flirtations. But once she comments that "anything could happen" (in the next half hour) and he realizes what game he's playing he demurs and wanders off. It's key that this is done with Jackie as well. Already we can see that she is the most soap opera of the soap opera characters here - cut from the Hilda Ogden cloth. So making the Doctor able to both fit into a scene with her and, crucially, trump her and wander out when he wants to quickly establishes that the Doctor is capable of functioning inside a soap opera.

Having established the point, the show presses it. Rose carries on her business, trying to talk to him, but the camera frequently wanders back to the Doctor as he looks about Rose's flat. This is the closest the show comes to the fish out of water joke, but the real joke is that he's not a fish out of water. Instead he's more than capable of flipping through celebrity magazines and weighing in on the latest gossip. It's worth remarking in particular on this bit, since it's one of the things glommed onto by a certain segment of the audience as a complaint. The issue, apparently, is that the Doctor is enough of a reader of celebrity magazines to be up to date on the gossip (and indeed, an expert on the gossip - he knows secrets the tabloids don't), which seems unlike him. But what this complaint misses is that this is the only scene where he displays knowledge of this sort. It is, in other words, because he's basically in *EastEnders* at the moment that he knows about celebrity gossip, and as soon as he goes back into his own show, or to some other show, that knowledge dissipates. What it establishes, in other words, is not that the Doctor keeps up on celebrity gossip, but that the Doctor can seamlessly enter *EastEnders* if he wants to.

There is a second aspect of engagement with what we might call "old school fans" involved here. The act of dropping the Doctor into a soap opera is, of course, impish. But it's impish because of the very underlying problem we're trying to solve here: old sci-fi shows like Doctor Who don't fit with populist things like soap operas. Part of what's going on in this scene is a blatant and noisy rejection of the usual logic of these things - a recognition that the border between these two things is existent, but that it is permeable. But there's a larger issue, which is that Doctor Who, historically, has a bit of a poor relationship with soap operas. First there's its failed effort in 1982 to work like one, ratcheting up its cast size and playing with story arcs and twice-weekly airings. Then came its disastrous period of airing opposite *Coronation Street* in the late 1980s. But the crowning agony was 1993's *Dimensions in Time*, a Children in Need sketch that mashed up Doctor Who with *EastEnders* in a deeply painful and embarrassing fashion. Putting the Doctor inside a soap opera, in other words, isn't just a cheeky bit of populism designed to piss off all the right people. It's playing with fire, allowing the series to come in contact with the iconography that eventually did it in.

The problem with the Doctor walking into a soap opera, of course, is that Doctor Who is likely to follow him. And so, of course, the arm attacks. But let's pause and look at how utterly different this attack is from the basement attack of the mannequins. There the mannequins were built to as objects of horror, and their attack was played like something scary (ludicrous as it was). But here the mannequin arm attacks in the context of a quick bit of farce in which Rose and the Doctor are in different rooms carrying on parallel monologues instead of communicating. There's a big set piece in which Rose thinks the Doctor is just messing around with the arm in the same way Mickey was earlier, at which point the arm hangs in the air and does a very silly looking swivel before it flies to attack Rose.

The physics of this are one thing - what, exactly, propels the plastic hand through the air? It's just about intelligible that the Autons can control anything plastic, and if you really scrunch up your face and put your mind to it you can figure out why the mannequins have hand guns, but there's nothing that explains why the plastic arm can fly through the air. It's deeply, deeply silly, and it's there only to provide a deeply silly fight scene. But in doing so it reiterates a key truth about how this divide works in the first place. Simply put, the Autons are also transformed by crossing over the doorstep and entering the soap opera. They go from horror movie threats to comedic threats, switching from something out of *Dawn of the Dead* into something a bit more *Shaun of the Dead*. Even still, however, there's a carefully policed set of rules here. There's a shot of Jackie Tyler starting up the hairdryer so as to answer the question of why she doesn't come out and get involved in the arm wrestling, which is important given that she really can't be in that. Rose can cross the line between these two shows and function, but Jackie does not belong in the same shot as an Auton in a very different way to the way in which Rose is jarring.

This also leads us to what we might call the Problem of Jackie Tyler's Coffee Table. The coffee table, you see, is shattered in the fight with the arm. But it's never mentioned again. This is, of course, fine within the rules of Doctor Who, which we've already seen is the sort of show where aliens have elaborate plots that involve murdering electricians. But it's not at all fine within the rules of Jackie's show. The character who mere minutes earlier was complaining about how the shop gave Rose airs and graces is not one who could have a coffee table completely shattered and never complain about it. On a basic and practical level, replacing the coffee table would be a non-trivial expense for her, especially after losing her daughter's income. Beyond that, she's just not the sort of person to let that go. Obviously the rules of Doctor Who trump the rules of Jackie's show here, but it's still shocking how quickly that happens. Ostensibly the Tylers' flat should be much more durable than this. The Doctor is the one out of his element here. And yet his plot logic quickly reasserts itself, revealing just

how fast and thoroughly he deforms the narrative space around him, leaving it almost unrecognizable to itself.

Following this, the Doctor attempts to leave Rose behind again. Again, there are some rules quietly being broken here. The format of an initiation - refused calls to adventure and the like - is still there. But there's no reason for Rose or the Doctor to refuse the call twice like this. Tellingly, the refusal is itself delayed. The Doctor tries to leave Rose almost immediately after, but instead finds himself caught in a ninety-second tracking shot as he walks from Rose's flat to his blue box. The tracking shot is firmly within Rose's visual grammar. The extended shot makes it feel like it comes out of a documentary - the sort of kitchen sink social realist approach that's usually used to depict the working class. Note that while it's not a jittery hand-held camera, the tracking shot is allowed to bob and jerk around a little, making the presence of someone holding it tangible. The entire sequence clearly comes out of our soap opera and not out of Doctor Who. And throughout it the Doctor is trying to get rid of Rose while she persistently refuses to leave. It is, in other words, an extended demonstration of Rose's narrative power over the Doctor.

So Jackie both can't get brought into the Doctor Who narrative - c.f. the hairdryer - and can't maintain the purity of her narrative in the face of it - c.f. the coffee table. Rose, on the other hand, can get brought into Doctor Who and encounter the Autons, but can also impose her narrative on Doctor Who. The ability to have your perimeter breached by the outside world is, in other words, strangely central to the ability to maintain a firm definition of the border itself. Only by falling in and out of worlds do we define what those worlds are. Observe also that when Rose decides to engage with the Doctor and listen to his story - i.e. when the Doctor allows his world to be breached by Rose - the long take ends and we go back to telling the story through editing.

(A nervous glance at our caution tape, standing ominously strong in the wind as we continue our investigation.)

So Rose is brought back into the Doctor's world. But this time as a transaction - as a deal. She'll give up her control over the camera if he explains who he is. And so he does in the "we're falling through space" monologue. We started in space, remember, and then fell into the world. So this, on one level, briefly restores the initial scale of things that we sacrificed to get to Rose. But the effect is rather more striking than just that. The monologue is well-crafted to produce an immediate sense of scale: we're genuinely taken aback by just how massive the Doctor's sense of scale and perception is. It's not just the description of the Earth's astronomy, but his plaintive exclamation, "I can feel it." Also, the symbolism of hands is back - the Doctor grasps Rose's again as he says he can feel it, playing off the hand's role as a sensory organ. And then, at the end of the monologue, as he rejects Rose a second time, he lets go again, breaking the connection. He goes back to his blue box, and it vanishes, falling right out of the world.

And so we acquire another key dimension of things: the eccentric and excessive spaces that can be carved within the world. What is so compelling is not merely the scope of the Doctor's perceptions and his world, but the fact that the sense of space widens so quickly once Rose steps into his world. The threshold of his world is not just a genre switch - it's a switch into a whole new sense of scale. His world is big in a way that the world around it isn't.

There's a phrase that describes that…

(This also marks the first appearance, musically, of what Russell T Davies and Phil Collinson cheekily refer to as "Flavia's Theme." It's the musical cue with the single female vocalist oohing around on it that they use whenever Time Lord stuff comes up - that is, when the show gets a bit poncey in its sense of mysticism. Embedded in this is a fascinating double-edged joke: on the one

hand the mysticism is named via a reference to a dense and fannish continuity point - Chancellor Flavia is in fact most notable for becoming Lord President of Gallifrey in *The Five Doctors* and then never appearing or being mentioned ever again. But there's also an embrace of the camp here - Flavia is given an exceedingly stoic performance by Dinah Sheridan that makes her an immediate camp sensation destined to be loved by the sizable contingent of gay Doctor Who fans. It's not just that mysticism and fannishness are twinned here, but that the slightly cheesy music trotted out when the mysticism gets a bit excessive is itself a self-conscious celebration of camp excess within the program.)

But what is the role of this deferral? If it is inscrutable in terms of the initiation ritual that this scene is rapidly turning out to be, it is at least straightforward in terms of the basic grammar of television. This is a return to the old model of television as a system of anticipation. This was, for a long time, how television worked - a constant game of anticipation and payoff, where much of the pleasure was the approach of the inevitable. "Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin." And so part of the structure of *Rose* is the deferral of the inevitable. We know as soon as the Doctor grabs Rose's hand and says "run" that she's a Doctor Who companion. But again, the initiation isn't hers. She's initiated then and there. The point is instead the extended lingering - the anticipation as the inevitable wedding approaches. This is foreshadowed in the program's earliest trailers, which proclaim that it's almost time for Doctor Who… but not yet. The point isn't the events that unfold, in other words, but the act of watching the events.

And so Rose, having been kicked out of the program twice, starts to try to figure out about this whole Doctor Who thing. Here we run into an interesting problem with this entire structure and theory. On the one hand, the evidence for the claim that *Rose* is an initiation ritual seems watertight. Everything is pointing to it. But there's no opportunity. A key step is absent. Already we've had to take as evidence the cut-up presence of Graham Norton, a broadcast phenomenon without author. We're far from the realm of plausible authorial intent. Simply put, Russell T Davies isn't the type to execute the sort of ritual that's shaping up here. The crime is intelligible, the suspect isn't.

But does a ritual need a ritualist? Here we are, playing in the detritus of ideas and culture, the seeming payoff to Lawrence Miles's hypothetical ritual the month this series was announced. (Such a masterful build and use of anticipation, that.) Do we need to have someone consciously pulling the strings? At some point these things move on their own momentum. I say all of this mostly because the logo of the fake search engine Rose uses looks shockingly like some sort of Lovecraftian horror of the sort that might be lurking under the surface of the world. Then again, it could also just be made to look like the Nestene Consciousness on the cover of *Doctor Who and the Auton Invasion*. (Of course, in the Virgin books it was established that the Nestene Consciousness was the offspring of H.P. Lovecraft's Shub-Niggurath…)

So Rose goes on the Internet and meets herself a Doctor Who fan. That is, after all, clearly what Clive is. He is us. Caught dead to rights, he is us, the fat, sweaty bastards of us. Nutter anoraks buying memorabilia from a washed-up sci-fi show. That's who we are. We who paw about the edges of this thing, discontent to just let it be a fun television show. We who are dragging the holy and sacred (or at least reasonably popular for a few weeks) Billie Piper through the filth of our childish obsessions. We who (*sob*) blog. Paranoid conspiracy theorist out in the shed stitching up his little obsession. Unfit for human consumption. Ashamed.

Actually, he's got a wife and kids; seems a perfectly pleasant bloke. So maybe we're not so bad after all.

[Watch Mickey play at being a chav. The class tone has changed again. Think whose

neighborhood this is, then look at the black kid from the council estate. Who do you think bought *Match of the Day* last month? Who do you think watched it? Who do you think bought *Dreamtime*? Whose computer was new enough to watch *Shalka*? And Mickey larks in it, pretending he's bad news and come to open up a can of ASBO on their ass. He's not - he's an oafish sweetie. But he can play the part.

But note the gulf in sincerity as well. Clive's wife jokes, "she?" as Rose arrives, because none of Clive's nutter friends are girls. But watch, Elli Garnett then plays it a bit too much like a TV ad, doing this self-aware little hip shake as she descends closes the door on Mickey Smith, carrying the basket of laundry. Meanwhile, Mickey is scowling it up in the car, looking absolutely ridiculous in this middle class neighborhood, without a care in the world.]

The lighting goes blue, nervously tracing the outlines of a paranoid conspiracy theory. A little claustrophobic and nervous - designed to put us on edge. We want to get out of this place. Again, the anticipation crackles. We know what we're in the midst of - some glorious popular culture obscenity. *Strictly Plastic Fever And How To Cure It* or something. (Mickey's in a yellow car.) What is this Doctor Who fan doing in the middle of it?

Actually, in ironic fact, a fair number weren't. The show launched without a US distributor. Nobody picked it up. This didn't air in the US until nearly a year later. And they didn't even give us the DVD set. You wanted Doctor Who, you had to know how to BitTorrent. And we bloody well did. We got onto Mininova and we downloaded this thing.

So actually, in all likelihood Clive isn't actually here, or is here for purely sentimental reasons. He probably watched it back around March 8th when it became one of the earliest and most high-profile pieces of video to leak on the Internet prior to its correct release date. Albums and songs were being leaked all over, but television? *Global Frequency* didn't leak until July, and so infuriated Warner Brothers that they killed a promising pilot. And here was the BBC's new flagship, their secret weapon to take back Saturdays, and everyone could see it a month early, decide whether to cut its throat with Ant and Dec or get out of its way and watch it sink.

In the end it appeared a blessing this time. The fans were always going to do what the fans were going to do. Some were going to adore it because it was new Doctor Who and actually pretty well made, and some were going to hate it because hating Doctor Who is what a Doctor Who fan does. And we yaffled on with all our nonsense early. And, you know, it wasn't so bad we all hated it. It was better than the McGann movie, or so would readily admit virtually all of us. (Just scale the McGann movie down a bit in judgment to make room for *Rose* above it. Plenty of us did.)

So, you know. Tabloid story defused. *The Sun* couldn't run Ian Levine smashing his telly in rage. These things matter when you're playing in the arena *Rose* is. This is a high stakes game. You cannot lose control of the story. If you do, you're gutted.

(They immediately lost control of the story when the fact that Eccleston had quit leaked. It was lost before *The End of the World*. Oh God, this is going to be a disaster.)

Meanwhile, observe that the Doctor is spotted on November 22nd, 1963. This is not an accident. The levels of in-joke here are, for a brief moment, slathered so thickly you cannot breathe. They use the same bloody frame of JFK as *Who Killed Kennedy*, for Christ's sake. But look at the bigger picture. Look at the metaphor that's inflating here. The Doctor isn't even in this bit of the story, but he's gone and circled his own history. Now think about the question of the McGann regeneration - is this or is this not Eccleston's first adventure? Did this man who has gone back to the day before he was born fight in the Time War? What is he doing there?

[But look, Clive is having so much fun here. He's loving this delivery. He's done this a dozen

times before, but now he gets to do it for a pretty girl. “The Doctor is a legend woven throughout history.” It’s his own version of Mickey’s “glare at everybody because he’s protecting Rose” look.

Mickey, meanwhile, has gotten bored of this television program. This is not for him. This is not his milieu. He wants out. “What’s that Mickey Smith,” Doctor Who says from within his magical box of wonders. “You want to fall out of the world?” And so out springs the evil wheelie bin!]

So Clive’s hilarious mistaking of eschatological fandom for how you impress pretty girls gets paralleled with Mickey’s descent into danger. There’s a lovely flipping here, the two worlds of television intermingling and performing each other’s functions. The very silly Mickey scene debuts Doctor Who’s awful CGI in the most gratuitous and over-the-top way, while Clive’s in the basement being a complete nutter. Nothing about Mickey’s scene looks intimidating, though the music says it is, but Clive’s depiction of the horrors of Doctor Who provide the tension.

[But let’s not forget that this is the worst thing that has ever happened to Mickey. This is a serious psychological trauma for which he will undoubtedly require extensive therapy that will be difficult to procure even under New Labour’s generous expansion of NHS funding as afforded through policies to create a business-friendly economy and, on occasion, a teensy-weensy smidgen of debt.

And that ultimately manifests as Mickey’s getting pulled into the garbage can. Watch how Noel Clarke maintains his slight overacting. He’s doing something hilariously savvy throughout this episode; he’s playing a bad actor. He looks like an embarrassment of a character. And by shoving him into this overwrought joke of a scene Davies instantly secures a vocal segment of the audience’s dislike for this character.]

And then, to make it all worse, the trash can burps - a seeming example of the absolute worst excesses of Davies’s style. It’s astonishingly puerile and stupid. But let’s be honest about what it feels like, given the context. It’s not that it’s an incredibly immature and lame joke. It is, but nobody hates a series for one or two horribly cornball moments, no matter how much some of us may fear that they do. No, it’s that it’s so avoidably lame. And so it immediately puts us in mind, say, building high for happiness, or the Bandrils, or the Magma Beast, or Kroll, or the Axons, or the Quarks, or the Zarbi. All the things we apologize for.

This coincides with Clive’s failure to convince Rose. Because, of course, the joke here is that everything Clive says is completely true: he’s an immortal alien, and all of these historical appearances of him are, in fact, the same man. Hit the nail on the head. (Actually, missed a key part of it, but, hey, it’s the thought that counts.) And Rose, quite sensibly, decides he’s a complete nutter because he is a fat man in the shed talking about aliens.

[Never mind that the Doctor was talking about aliens before and that this is obviously the best explanation for him. Rose isn’t in Doctor Who right now, and she doesn’t have those powers. She’s Billie Piper in the shop again, able to get along with this middle class man out of her own charm, but manifestly not going to fall for a story like that. Fandom’s account of the show is inadequate. It will have to be left behind.

But not before it does some damage. Mickey is, in effect, destroyed here. He gets swallowed up, in part because he can’t cross genre lines skillfully enough, but also, crucially, by fandom. The same people carefully primed to reject him for his overacting and the stupidity of his plotline are the ones who, by exposure, kill him.

(We should remember here the way in which the First Doctor dies: from exposure to the qlippothic energies of Mondas. The parallels here continue to echo ominously, threatening to completely break through our perimeter. Looking up from the crowd scene, the problem is obvious. Ten point eight million people clustered around the caution tape, peering in, trying to see what’s

going on. Is the suspect in the boat or not? How long can this perimeter hold them? And who within this place is working against us? This, our base under siege.)

And, of course, we also assume he's dead. I mean, this is a Robert Holmes pastiche. Of course the useless supporting character bites it the moment it's useful to the plot. And a possession too. The original of the Auton Duplicate is always dead. Who cares? He was a prat. We're disappointed to see him live at the end, frankly. Feels like a cop-out.

We now, of course, begin Mickey's plotline over the course of the next two seasons.]

So Rose fails to heed the warning, and returns to her car. But something is wrong. These two universes were never supposed to touch. And here we're in the boundary between existence as she knows it and the other universe that she doesn't understand. And so the relationships between the different molecular bonds and the actual shapes form a crystalline structure of ratios. Without the web to support it, the local space will fold up into itself, leaving scar tissue, cracks in the skin of the universe. And in those corners of the universe breed the most terrible things. Evils from the dawn of time.

Also, her boyfriend looks like a rubbish plastic version. (Which is arguably literally true - there's no reason the plastic bin should hold its shape. It's the most obvious thing to sculpt into Mickey on the fly.) And its played for stupid laughs again - the obnoxious inheritance of the burping trash bin. It's all over. This is horrible. Nobody is going to like this, and we're all going to be humiliated again. Time for Plan B. Operation "This Is Worse Than McGann." We can go sob into *The Gallifrey Chronicles* in a few months.

And then, oh God, the bloody restaurant scene, with the stupid Northern Doctor with his stupid grin and stupid ears does that stupid stupid thing with the stupid cork, and then bad CGI Mickey smashes everything up. Though actually, Sylvester McCoy said that was the best bit, and it is kinda fun. The kids probably loved it.

And my God, doesn't the Doctor look at home. This is what the man belongs doing. He's got total control of this. And look what sort of "this" it is - in particular the way in which Mickey's visual tick that Rose picks up on looks like a video glitch. He's at home in the complete breakdown of the narrative. Which is good, because Rose is going the wrong way, abandoning Doctor Who in favor of the mundane concerns of getting another job, deciding that this whole Doctor Who thing is far too dangerous.

It is easy to miss the fact that the Clive/Mickey section of the episode is an eight-and-a-half minute stretch of the episode in which the Doctor does not appear. Well, actually, that's hard to miss. It's designed to be the rubbish slow bit in the midst of the episode. You can, of course, get away with these if you need to. You just need to build a structure of anticipation. We know the Doctor and Rose are going to reunite, so that means we know we have to get through the awkward middle bit. It's a part of the episode we're designed to like less. And it's allowed to mulch out of the worst instincts of fandom, and then the Doctor swoops in and rescues us from them, and we're off on another corridor run!

Then the Doctor disappears into his strange blue box, leaving Rose in a suspense scene as she runs around the locked yard trying to find an escape. It's another scene in which a lot of time is spent on the same note, much like the shop cellar, devoted to putting her in immediate, present danger until, finally, out of pure desperation, she runs into the blue box.

And suddenly everything changes. It's another portal. She switches shows again. The lighting changes, the music changes, the shots change - we were cutting around the outside of the box a bunch, and now we're inside it and on a still shot. Then, to highlight it in the language of the preceding scene,

a visual joke. Whatever is inside the box is more terrifying than what was outside it, and so she runs back to her previous show and, of course, the previous music starts up again.

But now her phobia has changed: she circles the box. Last time she was in this running around scene she looked at the outer perimeter. Now she looks at the inner one - this emboited space she recoiled from. She's ignoring plastic monster boyfriend entirely until he finally bursts through the door and she remembers her original problem and nips back into the box, urgently bringing her chase scene in with her.

The Doctor shoos the chase away, and we get to see this space again. And we're back. We're back in the space we were in when last we saw the Doctor, clinging to the skin of our tiny little world, falling through space, out of stories, out of time. The camera pulls up in a long, languid pan, revealing the secret of this blue box:

It's bigger on the inside.

The Doctor calmly gets on with the plot. As calm as we've ever seen him, in fact. Casually moving about, solving the problem, getting ready for episode three. But note the fleeting moment of embarrassment that he's an alien - all but asks Rose's permission to bring his wacky sci-fi concepts into her show. Even in his space, he's meeting her halfway. In fact, she still asserts considerable authority over the narrative space, lighting into the Doctor on a point he'd not considered, namely whether or not Mickey was alive. (Why would the Doctor care? I mean, the bodycount of the story is hardly the interesting thing, now is it?)

But she can't actually disrupt the scene. The Doctor gets back to solving the plot, smashing some buttons and levers and then running outside. Rose, silly girl, stays behind, pointing out that it's not safe, but he tears out, ready to keep solving the plot. And for a moment we don't even realize what's wrong. Of course the Doctor goes on solving the plot. That's how this works. Why is she mucking about inside the TARDIS? Because that's how Doctor Who is put together; you can jump across narrative spaces like that. But it's not how Rose Tyler is put together, and so she lags behind.

(This happens as we transition from inside the TARDIS to outside. Again, the concern here is that of narrative thresholds and borders - the lines between worlds. The Doctor and Rose cross them differently, and in that slight tension is a gap - we stay with Rose as the Doctor's show plows on. This seems to be the focus of the ritual: this act of crossing the threshold. An initiation ritual about initiations. But again, that nagging problem: who is being initiated? Who is doing the initiation? What's going on here?)

The dialogue gets back on track a few seconds later, and their earlier disagreement persists. He is trying to run around in a Doctor Who story and save the world, and she's obsessed with whether one of the supporting cast is dead or not when he obviously is. This is, as it turns out, a really significant point of disagreement between them, and they almost storm off again as the Doctor defends his larger perspective.

But then they gel again. There is no particular reason for this. The scene just turns, becoming easy double-act banter about lampshading the series' conventions: lots of planets have a north. The tension fades out, we joke about the silly way the TARDIS looks, and she asks for the plot to be explained for her. And he's happy to play along because, actually, secretly, he doesn't know the next step of the plot. He's ready for the conclusion, but nobody's told him where the monster's lair is. And so he sits around waiting for an answer, and we slow down for a moment to catch our breath.

Then, slowly, we snap back to the elevator scene, where Rose thinks something through in a way he doesn't. Except this time she's not wrong. See how the camerawork allies itself to Rose, even in the Doctor's story - it frames the Doctor with the very thing he's talking about so that the audience

figure it out at the same time Rose does, leaving the Doctor in a comedic turn, the silly one in his own show.

The plot twist settled, it's time for another corridor run, this time over Westminster Bridge, slated for a good Dalek menacing in 2150. The hand symbolism's back again, but in a new way - they start running separately, then the Doctor looks, notices he doesn't have her hand, and reaches for it. Not to save her. Not to teach her. Just for the sheer joy of it. The musical cue resolves to the theme that played for Rose's montage, slightly off-kilter variations on it having been used for the last two corridor runs, thus symbolically connecting these stretches across the episode. They keep larking about ("the breast implants," Rose asks, and the Doctor looks rather concerned at the prospect of his show taking that plot twist), and then the Doctor pries open the door to the glowing red lair of Shub-Niggurath, the music withers, and we cross into yet another narrative space.

In a breath, it's all changed - from the enthusiastic long shots and energetic music to a sense of claustrophobic space. Tellingly, both the Doctor and Rose are nervous here. This isn't someone's television show. Not anymore. It's not even the horror space beneath the department store, but rather the horror that space represented. This is the land of monsters.

(And suddenly we know we've found it. The buried monster this ritual was always seeking to awaken. The horned god to whom we are initiated.)

Note the interplay between claustrophobia and vastness - the vast maze of scaffolding that lines the edge. Also, observe how Rose is properly afraid here, not in the sense of jumping at shadows, but in the sense of wanting to not be here, telling the Doctor to get it over with. Whereas the Doctor is at home here as well. This cannot be described as surprising as such; the Doctor is at home in any narrative space. That was the point of putting him in Jackie's flat earlier and watching him suddenly become hyper-aware of celebrity gossip.

And yet there's something wrong with being at home in this narrative space. If it is a necessary consequence of the Doctor's status as the master of all fiction that he be at home in any narrative space, including this one, then it is in no way a desirable consequence. Observe how even the most dedicated of fans are pushed out of the narrative by this scene. The Nestene Consciousness is conspicuously not a giant octopus like it used to be. (Although it is voiced by Nicholas Briggs now in a nod to the wilderness) And when the Doctor addresses the Nestene Consciousness he makes what sounds like it should be a continuity reference to "Convention Fifteen of the Shadow Proclamation." But it's not a reference to anything - it's something Davies made up, like Zogs of the Planet Zog. The result is unsettling - the Nestene Consciousness is something fans expect to understand, and we're not allowed to.

But, of course, that impact only works for fans. So there's a second disturbance of the order of things for people coming at the show from another direction. Rose finds Mickey, to the Doctor's obvious disgust. There's a degree to which this is subtly pushed too far for logic. That the Doctor doesn't think much about whether a supporting character is killed off is one thing, but this reveals it to be a slightly more disturbing and radical formulation of that approach: the Doctor simply doesn't care about questions like that. In fact, he's aware that Rose's entire approach of "caring about other people" doesn't fit in with this genre, suggesting they "leave the domestics outside" where outside, of course, means "in an entirely different television program." (Also crucial, of course, is that Mickey is completely useless in this scene.)

There is also, of course, another bit of initiation, or, at least, of the form of initiation. The Doctor descends into the underworld, but, more to the point, Christopher Eccleston earns his wings by doing one of the fundamental things actors playing the Doctor have to do in the course of the job is

attempting serious acting opposite something completely ludicrous. In this case, he has to talk to a churning mass of CGI. (In fact, Jon Pertwee was also blooded by the Nestene Consciousness as he attempted to convincingly wrestle around with a foam octopus arm while steadily realizing he had a really weird job now.) And the Doctor, accordingly, does a big "the human race is wonderful" speech, and Eccleston basically nails it.

But this isn't the place for that. This is the land of monsters, and while the Doctor may be comfortable here, he is not safe here and he does not control this space. And immediately it gets away from him: the mannequins are back, and the beast in the pit howls with rage. It's the end of all things.

And then the blue box enters the land of the monsters. And the entire narrative slips away. Suddenly we're talking about some unknown war, and the Doctor is begging, saying he fought in the war, pleading that he "couldn't save any of them" as the Nestene recoils, terrified.

What do we make of this blue box, then? It's made two substantial appearances before, both as a source of wonder. But the nature of its wonder is sublime - a sort of righteous fear. Remember, the blue box is inexorably linked to the vast interior space emboited by the Doctor's description of feeling the turn of the Earth and of clinging to the skin of the world. The blue box is a source of awe, but that can so easily turn into fear. And brought into the land of the monsters that's what it becomes: the thing monsters have nightmares about. What is this thing, and just how big on the inside must it be to scare even the devil himself?

Clearly, then, it's time for more Jackie Tyler. This sounds facetious, but there is, by this point, real power coursing through this space, and a move like this, cheeky as it sounds, must be taken seriously. From the land of the monsters we cut to the single most normal character of the series - the one who has been so systematically set up as outside the narrative that she can't even play with the evil arm or notice that her coffee table was smashed to pieces.

And yet we find Jackie at the police station, the words "Police" written out in font and color to match the Doctor's box. Her space quietly, and without her realizing it, mirrors the space of the monsters. The fear of monsters is about to bring this whole thing crashing down. Jackie, of course, doesn't know it, staying firmly within her own narrative space. Look at the lovely detail of her "late night shopping." Inexplicably it's at the Queen's Arcade, which is in Cardiff, not London, but in terms of appearances and tone it's obviously a posh and tourist-centered shopping mall. This is not, in other words, a place where Jackie Tyler is going to spend any money. She can't afford anything here. She's just going to look.

Meanwhile, hell itself is being torn apart by the Doctor's error. The beast below London awakens, opening its Eye to look upon the city. It is, as Rose puts it, the end of the world. (Actually, that's next week) The eschaton we thought we'd deferred is unleashed - the very city itself turned against us, deciding that it will take its tribute in blood.

We cut to another thing we did not expect - though for the second time in a row it is a case of cutting from something completely mad to something altogether mundane. There is no reason why Clive should reappear at this point, after all. But here he is, dragged out shopping with the family, complaining bitterly about spending "summer money in winter months," and he's just in time to witness the end of the world.

Which, of course, he recognizes immediately. Even as his wife looks excitedly at the dancing mannequins, albeit having initially been frightened, Clive knows something's wrong. Of course he does. He's a Doctor Who fan, after all. He's seen *Spearhead From Space* a dozen times, and knows the mannequin attack scene perfectly. He knows exactly what this is, and mouths the paranoid's most dreaded conclusion: "It's true. Everything I read, all the stories, it's true."

But this isn't just his nightmare or his experience anymore. This isn't just any alien attack. (There's a pattern here - something that doesn't fit inside this forty-four minute perimeter.) This is, as mentioned, a remake of a scene from *Spearhead From Space*. Actually, though, it's showing off a bit. *Spearhead From Space* meticulously cut around the Autons actually breaking through the windows because it couldn't afford the glass-break effect, and so this time we revel in that exact effect. It's self-consciously Doctor Who only better done.

It's also, however, self-consciously a very specific bit of Doctor Who. The Autons, as a whole, are a bit hyper-specific - a returning monster for the die-hards. But the mannequins? They're part of television lore. Watched by fifteen percent of the country in 1970 and remembered with a vividness that few other pieces of Doctor Who come close to mustering, the mannequins are a long-buried part of British popular consciousness. Suddenly we cut through all the crap and get to the part of Doctor Who that everybody always liked.

And at the moment this beast awakens two things happen. First, Jackie Tyler arrives on the scene, momentarily finding herself in the same place as Clive. Again, keep in mind the class difference here. It's not just that Jackie Tyler, soap character, does not belong in the same program as Clive's anorak conspiracy theorist. It's that Jackie shouldn't be shopping at those kinds of malls. But in the face of Doctor Who those differences are erased.

Second, and more importantly, Clive bites it, becoming the sacrificial supporting character. Note that he's the only character who both gets a line and dies in the entire story. He plays the role we thought Mickey was supposed to play - the character who gets gratuitously killed when his role in the plot is up. Only its even more gratuitous - he's actually brought back for the sole reason of killing him off. On the one hand, this is a rather grim joke about the necessity of killing off a particular sort of fandom. (Observe Clive's resigned expression before he gets shot. "Bollocks," he's thinking.)

But it's also, symbolically, the sacrifice to the beast. Some blood had to be spilled to release the monster, and now it is loosed upon the world, loosed so thoroughly that not even Jackie can hide from it. Whatever this ritual was, it is completed now. The thing it sought to unleash has come out, is free, is feasting upon the world. Not just the mannequins, but the idea of them - everything they symbolize, their role as critiques of television and capitalism, but also the sheer, barmy, wonderful madness of them. It has arrived.

(What is it, though? Slowly we realize, that's what all of the eleven million people pressed against our caution tape perimeter want to know. Not who did it, or why, or how. Just what happened. What is this crime scene? Whose blood is all over the ground?)

Tellingly, the Doctor is useless here. As is the TARDIS. Rose and Mickey shelter in its light (the lone source of cool light in the land of the monsters), but it cannot protect them. The Doctor doesn't have a solution. All is lost. It must be - it is, after all, his TARDIS and his comfort within the land of the monsters that has awoken the beast, caused it to gaze out of its sleepy Merlin Entertainment-owned eye. The most transgressive force within the narrative has led us down a blind alley, and now we are all damned for it. To seal the deal, the devil even names the Doctor: Time Lord, it says, and with that our fate is written.

Except, of course, the Doctor isn't the only transgressive force in the narrative. He's not the only one who has calmly stepped into genre after genre over the past thirty-eight minutes. And so, as the world crumbles and her mother is about to be shot by a roving mob of plastic brides, Rose Tyler steps up to the plate. Masterfully, crucially, she does not step up with any skills outside her own narrative. She is the working class London shopgirl, estuary accent and no prospects. The thing she draws on to defeat the Nestene is thus sheer brilliance: Jericho Street Junior School Under Sevens

Gymnastics Team. An utterly small scale, ordinary, unimportant athletics competition. Which she didn't even win.

What matters, in other words, is not what Rose Tyler brings, but merely that she brings something - that she is willing to assert her narrative nature even here, in the land of the monsters, where all hope has fled. She is willing to emboit herself, to insist on her interior dimensions, to insist on being the council housed shopgirl with no A levels and no prospects even in the face of the end of all things, and to throw that fact into the story, to insist, in one supreme magic act of will, that she is Rose Tyler.

It is in this regard telling that the mere fact of her deciding to grab a chain and swing madly into action is sufficient to save the day. The Doctor throws his Auton guard into the pit without Rose actually hitting him or doing anything, and the other guard stands dumbly around and lets Rose kick the anti-plastic out of its hand. It is, in other words, the fact of Rose's transgression against the narrative laws of the land of monsters, which say that she is small and nothing, is in and of itself enough to empower the Doctor again. It is not what she does, but that she does.

Tellingly, the scene is chaos. The Doctor and Rose running to the TARDIS and escaping, that's sensible enough, all makes sense. (And look at Rose's cheeky little grin at the exploding basement before she ducks into the TARDIS. She's loving this.) But there's something wrong here. The winding down calliope music as the Autons malfunction, moving from onrushing horrors to jerky, silly mannequins again reveals the extent to which Rose's victory involves a defiance of narrative conventions. The Autons weren't made to function in a world of Rose Tyler.

So there we have it. It was her initiation all along - her ascent to being a Mistress of the Land of Fiction, to assert her will over genres. It is the story of Rose Tyler becoming a magus, and all those red herrings where we thought otherwise were just that. The scene's identified, we can all go home now.

(And yet they're still there. Eleven million people, ringing our yellow tape, looking in. Staring. What are they looking at? What do they see?)

Except… a stray detail. The anti-plastic is blue, and as it pours out over the Nestine it arcs with the same blue-white light the TARDIS casts. Actually, if you want to be technical about it, that was the color of the Nestene's control ray that woke up the mannequins too. It was, as we observed, very much the TARDIS that set the Nestene off - its presence in the land of monsters that unleashed this strange hell from Britain's medial past across the land. Something is still unresolved here. Something's not right.

Indeed, the comedy of the winding down Autons gives way to Jackie nervously surveying the rubble and the dead. Something has gone wrong with the world. Jackie and Mickey understand this, cowering, as one would, from this terror. Only Rose seems unmoved, chiding Mickey for his uselesness. Why couldn't he defy his narrative conventions and kick some ass? What's wrong with him? He's even scared of the TARDIS, for God's sake.

And the Doctor is calm. Even as he admits that Rose saved his life and the planet, and that he needed her there, he's calm. This is, in fact, his show they're all in. It's just that it's been incomplete. There's been something missing. Some key component of its premise that he hasn't had. The Doctor needs a companion. That's how this works. The companion is why the Doctor can go to the land of monsters and simultaneously fit in as a part of the land of monsters and be OK. Yes, of course Rose saved his life. That's how it works. He knows that. And so he asks Rose to come with him - to travel across the universe.

And she refuses again. Decides to stay in her world of work and food and sleep; to forego the

danger and look after her stupid lump of a boyfriend. And so the Doctor leaves, his show incomplete, the initiation incomplete. Whatever we awoke goes back to sleep. We linger there for a moment - Rose and Mickey, in the alley, shocked and beginning their walk home. And it's all over. The town never lets us go.

("One day he dropped me off at a rally, and when I got back he told me he'd just popped off in the TARDIS for a while. A pretty long while, actually - like a year.")

Or not. One more stroke of the pen. One more little detail. The TARDIS comes back, the Doctor pops his head out, and he makes his final pitch. The one bit we'd managed to miss all this time.

It also travels in time.

And Rose takes off. At long last, she falls out of the world completely, unmoors herself into this bold new premise. That is, after all, what that final revelation promises. After all this, all of these genre mash-ups and pile-ups, it calmly adds one line to its pitch. "And then we can do other stuff too." It's done more varied stuff than anything else on television, and then it calmly, casually lets slip that it's just getting started. That this wasn't setting up all the tenets of the series, but just showing us one set of tricks it can do. And Rose runs towards the TARDIS to see what else there is, the final shot the door closing behind her. (It is perhaps important to note that the "next time" preview is, in fact, a part of our forty-four minutes and ten seconds. Rose is, in fact, initiated into the future of Doctor Who, a self-conscious parade of bizarre aliens. The show doesn't just hint at its future promise - it promises us that next episode is completely insane.)

And that's it. That's our perimeter explored. Forty-four minutes and ten seconds. But the mystery stands. What happened here? A television show launched, yes. A pair of decent characters. A pretty cool premise, though, somewhat puzzlingly, a premise that is not actually explored in the course of this episode. But somehow this does not add up to the experience of the moment. We've inventoried the contents, bagged and tagged every detail, but we somehow do not have the whole of it. Not yet. Not quite yet.

We have forgotten something. At the very beginning. Before the shot of the Earth and the zoom to Rose Tyler's alarm clock. Before Graham Norton and Billie Piper. Before any of it. Forty seconds of music. *Rose* is the lone episode of the new series to begin without a cold open - to go straight into its theme song. In the March 8th leak, in fact, the music is a remix of the original Delia Derbyshire cut-up electronic soundtrack, but by the 26th it had been replaced by Murray Gold's complete re-score of it, adding the so-called "chase" to it (the set of strings that run alongside the main melody).

Observe that the theme music begins with the sting - the high-pitched crash that kicks it off. The Derbyshire remix (which really doesn't belong over these credits) does not, starting straight with the ethereal weirdness of the tune. But the broadcast version uses the sting, originally developed for the end of episodes to segue smoothly from the cliffhanger to the music. (Its apex, of course, is in *Terror of the Vervoids* Part One, in which Bonnie Langford obligingly screams at the right pitch to tonally lead into the sting.) In other words, the music and the opening credits, the thing that names what we are watching, that symbolically sets the tone for this entire ritual, begins with a bit of sound designed to create a sharp, screaming demarcation between narrative spaces.

And suddenly it becomes clear. Suddenly we can make sense of everything we've seen. It hasn't been Rose's initiation, or the Doctor's, or anyone else's. It's been ours. From the moment we turned on BBC One, from the moment this program began, it has been us being initiated. All of us. Fans and viewers alike, eleven million of us pressed up to the glass, staring at this thing. This ritual to awaken a dead god from within the national consciousness, to release it out into our cities and our world. It has been our initiation all all along. Eleven million of us, brought into Doctor Who.

An initiation is, of course, the imparting of a secret. A piece of knowledge - an idea that changes who we are. We gaze into the depths of this vast thing that slept within the popular culture, and we know ourselves anew. We become different people, with new faces, new selves. That's it. We've been renewed.

Shall I tell you the ultimate secret, then? Yes? Are you seated comfortably? Then I'll begin. The ultimate secret; how it's bigger on the inside.

Look up again, at our perimeter. Our caution tape ring-road of these forty-four minutes and ten seconds that are *Rose*. It defines the space of our inquiry. The whole of what we talk about here. And on the outside are the eleven million, all of them, all of us, watching, being initiated into its secrets.

But wait. What, exactly, is encircled. The border of *Rose* and the border of everything that is not *Rose* are, after all, the same thing. A ring of caution tape encircling these forty-four minutes and ten seconds and a ring of caution tape encircling the rest of the world are, in the end, indistinguishable. And so this brief stretch of time rings the world like an ouroborous, ensnares eleven million people in its web, takes hold of decades of history, of everything else on television. Forty-four minutes and ten seconds of television in which sit, emboited, the whole of the world. Everything that's ever happened. Everything that ever will.

It's March 26th, 2005. Tony Christie is at number one with "(Is This the Way to Amarillo)", featuring Peter Kay. Gwen Stefani and Eve's "Rich Girl," Nelly and Tim McGraw's "Over and Over," and Jem's (actually quite good) "They" also chart, as does Elvis Presley with "Return to Sender," a strange but, for the circumstances, fitting throwback to the past.

In recent news, James Callaghan, Prime Minister who oversaw the Winter of Discontent and whose defeat led to the rise of Margaret Thatcher, died, his death announced on BBC One at approximately 7:45 this evening. A revolution in Kyrgyzstan has resulted in the overthrow of Askar Akayev. An explosion took place at a BP-owned oil refinery in Texas City, killing fifteen. The Constitutional Reform Act, creating a Supreme Court of the United Kingdom and enshrining a more thorough separation of powers, received its Royal Assent and became law.

Doctor Who has returned to television.

Till We Meet Again, Sarah (*School Reunion*)

I self-consciously modeled the basic structure of this post on *The Brain of Morbius*, right down to the final sentence. I'd thankfully just been editing the Hinchcliffe-era book (out in November if all goes well), and so the tone of the blog from the era Sarah Jane hails from was fresh in my mind.

It's odd how that doesn't always work. I think the Hinchcliffe era provides some of the best posts in the blog (there were at least two corkers I didn't use for this collection), but that style and approach just doesn't quite work for the new series. The presence of Sarah Jane let me get away with the slight foreignness of it. But so did the weird invocation of the Time War and the continuity glitch presented by the Doctor's "half a dozen times" line, which let me do a mad retcon of the series.

The opportunity to create a counterfactual bit of continuity comes up rarely these days. Back in the early days of the series when ideas come up that eventually get dropped it was easy, but now that what Doctor Who is has become relatively more certain it's a lot rarer to see a weird detail that lets you rewrite the history of the series. Thankfully in their attempts to simplify Sarah Jane and the Doctor's relationship Davies and Whithouse opened the door, letting me indulge in the sort of series-rewriting speculation that I used to.

I don't know that I can possibly say enough words about how hard it is to watch the final scenes of this story these days. I may have actually cried. Don't tell.

Previously on TARDIS Eruditorum

It's October 23rd, 1976. Pussycat are at number one with "Mississippi," with Rod Stewart, Chicago, ABBA, and Rick Dees and his Cast of Idiots also charting, the latter with, well, the only song they ever chart with, "Disco Duck (Part One)." In the week prior copyright is extended by twenty years in the United States and Cearball Ó Dálaigh resigns as President of Ireland because the Minister of Defense insulted him. And, the day in question, Lis Sladen makes her final appearance on Doctor Who.

The show almost immediately collapses. Three weeks later, in the very next story, a particularly violent cliffhanger attracts the rage of moral crusader Mary Whitehouse, whose rantings are deemed sufficiently inconvenient as to necessitate a bureaucratic change. Doctor Who producer Philip Hinchcliffe is moved over to produce *Target*, whereas *Target*'s intended producer Graham Williams is put on Doctor Who with a mandate to tone down the violence. The Williams era has its moments, but is largely a brutal step down from the highs that Doctor Who reached with Lis Sladen around, and the show methodically circles the drain for a decade before finally falling through.

Thirty Years Later…

It's April 29th, 2006. Gnarls Barkley remains crazy, while Rihanna, Fall Out Boy, and the Black Eyed Peas also chart. In the last week, Benedict XVI was reported to have agreed to a relaxation of rules on condoms (which are, for the record, a wildly more fascinating and unusual theological issue than anyone gives them credit for being), Tony Snow became White House Press Secretary, several years too early to be the victim of image macros involving government lies and the phrase "You know nothing, Tony Snow," and Silvio Berlusconi announces that he'll resign as Prime Minister of Italy, like he does every few years.

On television, Lis Sladen returns to Doctor Who in Toby Whithouse's *School Reunion*. A big episode by any measure, deserving of a big post. No fancy formatting - let's just take a wander. The good old-fashioned way, like we used to do.

One line of criticism regarding this episode is the idea that Sarah Jane is somehow cheapened by being put into a "romance" plot - that her character is lessened somehow by becoming "the ex," as Mickey puts it. But let's be careful here. Yes, Sarah's relationship with the Doctor is clearly one that plays a role in her life that for other people are filled by romantic partners. But there's no suggestion that it was romantic as such. In fact, there's an explicit hedge against it - what devastates Sarah Jane is explicitly the fact that nothing earthly, romance included, can possibly compare to adventures in the TARDIS.

On the other hand, one can't deny that the question of romance is present in the episode. But what's interesting is that there is a clear distinction here between the frame and the content, so to speak. Yes, the relationship among the Doctor, Rose, and Sarah Jane is presented in the televisual terms of a love triangle, but nothing whatsoever in the past of Doctor Who supports the idea that just because you present something in the frame of a genre it is entirely a part of that genre.

The key observation is who makes the "missus and the ex" comment: Mickey. Ignore absolutely everything else about *School Reunion*, in fact, and focus on Mickey and Sarah Jane's relationship, as it is the single most interesting thing in the story. Mickey, after all, is from *EastPowellStreet*. He belongs to the soaps. It's not just the fact that Sarah Jane runs into the Doctor's world again that prompts her story line, in other words, but the fact that she runs into Rose's. Or, more to the point, Mickey's, because Rose is by this point treated more like a character in the Doctor's world than one in *EastPowellStreet*. Becoming a god will do that to you. (Observe the stark difference between her two appearances in Victorian stories - in *The Unquiet Dead* she's in a period gown, in *Tooth and Claw* she's in contemporary clothes. She's become bigger than any genre she steps into, including her own.)

And crucially, Sarah Jane Smith is a Doctor Who companion. She has no life beyond that series. She's a journalist, ostensibly, but is this really her plan? Go to schools where it looks like aliens might be running a Doctor Who plot and write news stories about them to stop them? I mean, try imagining Sarah Jane's day-to-day life. How exactly does this style of journalism make her any money? It does not seem like anything that can happen at Deffry Vale High School can possibly make a publishable news story. And, further, she's apparently the sort of person who drives around with a broken-down K-9 in the back of her car. This, I think, says it all about how fundamentally ill-suited she is to real life.

And this isn't a problem. She wasn't designed for real life. She was designed for a specific 1970s television show, and when the Doctor left her she stopped existing. There is no Sarah Jane Smith before *The Time Warrior* or after *The Hand of Fear*. That's not how fiction works. You can write one, but there isn't one. And even if you write one, you're only adding a version to Sarah Jane Smith who stopped existing after *The Hand of Fear*. That's what happens in stories when they end. That's why endings are sad.

But there's no avoiding an ending. Everything ends. That's how stories work. The secret of alchemy is material social progress, and that means death. Sarah Jane knows that. She was quite literally there when it happened. That's the consequence of it. The story after Sarah Jane leaves is the one with the continuity bit that cancels the series. This is what the Hinchcliffe era was about: death. And given that, Sarah Jane's ending is a mercy because she gets to just walk away, held in our memories forever, our Sarah Jane.

Put another way, we can end the story at *The Hand of Fear* because then Lis Sladen never dies. Because it's impossible to watch this now without that event just ripping through you. It was one thing when Hartnell died - he was always old. Troughton was harder, but it's key to remember that he was

around for a long time. His presence haunted the entire series - he appeared with four other Doctors, almost with a fifth, and died at the dawn of a sixth. And it was a long time ago. So was Pertwee, honestly - over a decade ago when Lis Sladen died. And that had been the last really big one. Yeah, there were sad ones. Verity Lambert was hard. Jacqueline Hill, oof. John Nathan-Turner, actually, was really sad, as we've learned.

And Lis Sladen would have been like those, except for this story. Because she got brought back to be a regular on the new series, and to get her own spinoff. And for God's sake she deserved it. I mean, you talk about your heartwarming stories - that she gets that kind of late career recognition. But it made her death so fucking hard for fandom. It was just one of the most devastating things to happen. And this episode is already so metatextual that it's impossible not to read it that way.

And that's the choice you get to make. You can leave her at *The Hand of Fear* or you can let her come back. But if she comes back, she gets old and dies. Those are the rules. Those are the two worlds you get to live in.

She gets old. She changes. She has to. You cannot just walk from *The Hand of Fear* to *School Reunion* without stepping through thirty years of history like they're just pages in a book. The rooms aren't arranged that way. If you go from *The Hand of Fear* to *School Reunion* you get a character who simply does not work in the series any more. Because she hasn't changed in thirty years, and the series has. So she can't change just by contact with the show, because of the Blinovitch Limitation Effect or something - look, I could work this bit of theoretical poetry out if I wanted to, but it's not actually that interesting. Let's skip ahead.

The fact that she gets aged to match up with the show through a soap opera love triangle plot is a joke. But it's a joke that ties a particular connection between Mickey and Sarah Jane. Mickey has become a sort of *Lone Gunmen* character - a perfectly ordinary guy who's become a Doctor Who fan, only he's done it within the story instead of outside of it. Mickey Smith's *From Outer Space*. This is only possible in this new iteration of the show where it's about its own success - now that Doctor Who is a thing in the culture it has ordinary people who are fans, and so Mickey has become a meta joke about that. It's very clever, and it keeps him present in a show that's now about Doctor Who being a cultural force that *Coronation Street* will poach a producer from. (Likewise, Jackie becomes the person who still really doesn't get this Doctor Who thing, even though all the kids are into it.) Sarah Jane Smith is a Doctor Who character who is suddenly thrust awkwardly into being a soap opera character, Mickey Smith is a soap opera character who is suddenly thrust awkwardly into being a Doctor Who character.

And then there's the tin dog. Tin is one of the alchemic metals, just as mercury is. If the Doctor is mercurial than describing K-9 as the "tin" dog is as significant as changing the Cybermen from being lunar to being martian. Again, wibbly wobbly, alchemical whemical, but the end result of the alchemical argument will be that describing K-9 as tin in an alchemical sense will result in him being a force of the old order that is holding us back and that we must surpass even though it hurts. I'm sure Jane can explain it in comments.

Shortly after Sarah Jane's departure, as one of the first acts of the new producer, K-9 was brought into the series. He was at once immensely popular with children and a perfect symbol of the show's decline because he was, let's be honest, absolutely stupid. There's thus an oddly fitting balancing of him and Sarah Jane - her departure marks the end of the beginning, his arrival marks the beginning of the end. And they're inexorably paired because of a naff spinoff attempted in the 1980s that didn't work, but that starred the two of them.

The problem is, K-9 can't grow old. He's a robotic dog. There's no future for him. He's disco.

And so he's dying. Decaying within the series, a festering wound. Putrefying. Fittingly, the monsters are putrefactive themselves, transmuting as a result of… wait, actually. Why do Krillitanes have oil? This is never explained in the plot. They have to use the children because they're allergic to their own oil, but why they have their own oil in the first place is unknown. But the fact that they are creatures of continual change explains it - they are oil in the crude oil sense - the carbonization of life itself. They change through death.

In other words, they're creatures of chemistry, not alchemy - a rationalist cult science fiction series come to destroy our fun little televisual fairy tale. They're even led by Anthony Stewart Head, who is of course both brilliant and cult, in the second funniest instance of Doctor Who directly plundering *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. And look at what they offer the Doctor - the ability to go back to the Time War.

Ah, yes. The Time War. That big mythic thing, the awful scar of cult television and cancellation. Here's an interesting question: why does the Doctor respond to Sarah the way he does in the basement? I mean, "everyone died, Sarah" has to be one of the most weirdly jarring lines ever - a complete non-sequitur of a conversation. Is part of it the shock of him seeing her? No, because he's overjoyed to see her still living. It's something else - it's her horrified reaction. That she thought he'd died.

Because he did, of course. In the very next story, which pinned that stupid regeneration limit in place for absolutely no reason whatsoever other than Robert Holmes needing a reason why the Master was decaying and not Roger Delgado. The show was given an endpoint so the Master could look like a pizza. That is how far the show fell after Sarah Jane Smith left. (Delgado, of course, was the first really big "death in the family" for Doctor Who.) But that's not what he's referring to. He's referring to the Time War. Which is actually ages after Sarah Jane left. And that's not the only weird thing about that conversation - there's also the whole regenerated "half a dozen times since we last met," which doesn't work. Even based purely on *The Five Doctors* it doesn't work, except, of course, John Hurt. But she met McCoy and McGann in novels, so it still doesn't work unless you take that line as decanonizing the wilderness years in toto. (Or at least the BBC Books range.) Which, yuck.

Except that we've already come to read the wilderness years and the Time War as equivalent. So the only issues are related to John Hurt, the wilderness years, or *The Five Doctors*. Two out of three are the Time War. Which the Doctor overtly brings up. Why? Surely the easiest explanation, consistent with absolutely everything we are told about the Time War, is that every single Gallifrey story got retconned by it. And so when the Doctor went from *The Hand of Fear* to *The Deadly Assassin* he really did go straight to the Time War, because that's what *The Deadly Assassin* is now. (And notably, this tidies up *The Five Doctors* as well, which, as a weak spot in time due to four incarnations of the Doctor being there at once, and furthermore as what must be a fixed point in time given the momentous political events, was surely a major battleground of the Time War. I mean, there was lone, mad Dalek - the only time we've actually *seen* a Dalek on Gallifrey - trapped in the Death Zone, fallen through time, screaming out for orders that would never come.)

So what we have are cult villains threatening to eat the entire past of the series by elevating the Doctor to the status of a god. And, of course, the real joke is that they're rubbish. These aren't the Daleks. They may talk a big game and supposedly be really bad "ancient foes" that even the Doctor is scared of, but they're firmly in the tradition of suicidal vegetable-enviers and ancient gods with thrones that have bum-massaging hands. But they're not actually huge threats. There's never really any danger to this story, and there's not supposed to be. There's just some rubbish bat creatures. The only

danger they pose is the brief flirtation with the narrative collapse of the series posed by letting the Doctor go back to the Time War and save them all. Even Sarah, who doesn't have to get old if only the Doctor embraces the ropey old cult show.

And Sarah Jane says no. Sarah Jane Smith says it is better to grow old and to die than to do that. And she's the only one who has to. But she accepts it. She has to. She knows. The secret of alchemy is material social progress. To defeat the harsh chemistry of the Krillitane requires true alchemy. She will pick the real world of Mickey Smith and love and dying. Because it doesn't mean abandoning the Doctor's world, it just means growing up.

Except there's one other price. It is rarely remarked upon that the only time a proper unambiguous companion has ever really died in the new series is K-9. Yes, Rory, but Rory comes back. K-9 doesn't. Not this K-9. Not K-9 Mark III, the robot dog that first appeared in *A Girl's Best Friend*, the pilot episode of *K-9 and Company*, and then again in *The Five Doctors*. Because the series has to sacrifice its past. Sarah Jane accepting death means K-9 has to die. It's not quite enough to accept death in theory. Something actually has to die. We have to get over our pasts.

So K-9 dies. He gets the big, epic heroic death scene as a companion sacrifices themselves to save humanity. And the wonderful thing is he relishes it, going out with an "Affirmative" before nuking the school. (And in the process making the picked on nerd cool!) He's a badass motherfucking dog. He should be voiced by Samuel L Jackson or something. And in that is something else. Triumph of the camp, perhaps. The reclamation. The thing we get. Death is the price paid. What do we get for our death? What did Sarah Jane safe for us? This. A tin dog sacrificing himself in a blaze of glory to blow up a school and make the bullied kid a hero. Hooray, as Davies and Gardner would put it.

And notably, of course, Mickey is the tin dog. There's an interesting cyclic structure to this episode. Sarah Jane meets Mickey Smith and gets cast in a love triangle due to her abandonment issues from the Doctor. This gives her the strength to accept death and thus to redeem K-9 by offering him a spectacular and epic death that is the apotheosis of the 70s cute robot aesthetic he belonged to. And K-9 gives Mickey a way into Doctor Who. The Doctor needs a Smith. Mickey Smith is elevated to where he gets to see the wonders of the universe because of the giddy camp wonder of a disco tin dog - the one that featured in *Queer as Folk* at that. And that's our reward. That's what we get for accepting death. Giddy wonder. The fact that we're alive in the first place. The ability to revel in the triumphant death of a disco tin dog from the year five thousand.

That's the secret of alchemy.

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